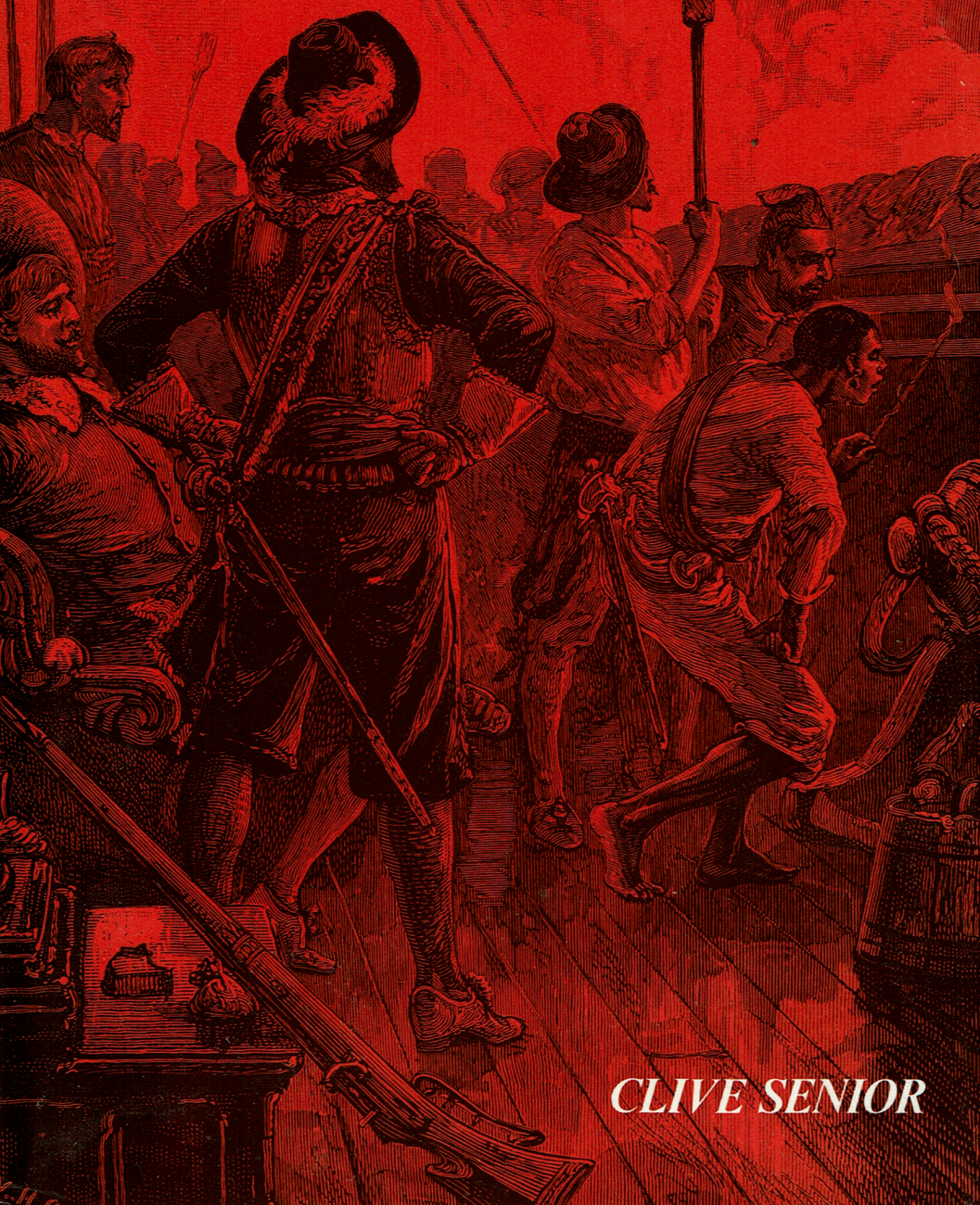# A Nation of
Pirates

English Piracy in its Heyday

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A NATION OF PIRATES

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English Piracy in its Heyday

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Contents

Introduction

After the death of our most gracious Queene Elizabeth of blessed
memory, our Royall King Iames who from his infancie had reigned in
peace with all Nations, had no imployment for those men of warre,
so that those that were rich rested with that they had; those that
were poore and had nothing but from hand to mouth, turned
Pirats . . .
– Capt John Smith, *The bad life and conditions of Pyrats*

The year 1603 was of great significance, both for England as a
whole and for English seamen in particular. It marked the
watershed between the Tudor and Stuart dynasties; between
war and peace. Elizabeth, for all her diplomacy, was, in the last
resort, a queen of war; James Stuart was a monarch whose rule,
both in Scotland and England, was blessed by peace. For the
English, nearly twenty years of continual war under Elizabeth
were followed by an even longer period of peace under James.

Conditions at sea at the beginning of the seventeenth century
strongly favoured an increase in piracy, and because of their
peculiar seafaring experience it was the English, of all the
nations, who were best able to exploit the situation. They had
been conditioned by the expansion of privateering during the
war with Spain, which had fired the popular imagination with
a sense of excitement and adventure, and had drained a large
proportion of the wealth and energy of the country. The capacity
of the English to wage private war by sea was unparalleled as
the new century began, and the vigour of English maritime
enterprise was even felt abroad, where Englishmen were promi-
nent in financing and manning the privateers of other nations.
Because of this aggressiveness, English seamen had already
gained a reputation as arch-pirates by 1600.

The sudden transition from war to peace naturally threw the
problem of piracy into sharp relief. Piracy had, of course,
existed in Elizabeth's reign, but then much of the maritime

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aggression of the English had been absorbed by privateering – a system whereby private ships were authorised by commissions of reprisal or letters of marque to go to sea to make war on the enemy and to capture hostile shipping and goods. Privateering was not always confined to wartime. Letters of marque were also issued during periods of peace to authorise merchants and others to recoup losses which they had suffered at the hands of foreigners. However, this was not true during James's reign, for the king adamantly refused to issue letters of marque to his subjects in any circumstances. James was a Scot with little appreciation of the concept of privateering, which to him seemed to be not far removed from piracy. There was, indeed, considerable support for such a view. The main aim of privateers – the acquisition of booty – was the same as that of pirates. The only difference between the two was that the privateer's depredations were supposed to be governed by the limits of his commission. In practice, however, many privateers acted no better than pirates, pursuing their booty at will and committing spoils which could never be justified by their commissions.

Because of James's uncompromising attitude on privateering, the transition from war to peace was more abrupt than it might otherwise have been; in effect, a nation which had grown accustomed to living by plunder at sea was suddenly forbidden from taking prizes under any circumstances.

Under these conditions, there could be no confusion about what constituted piracy. A pirate was, quite simply, anyone who resorted to robbery and violence on the sea or in the creeks and rivers which came under admiralty jurisdiction. Some Englishmen tried to circumvent the law by obtaining foreign letters of marque and claiming that they should be treated as foreign privateers rather than pirates. However, this loophole was soon closed by royal proclamation, and after 1605 all British subjects found serving aboard foreign privateers were unhesitatingly treated as pirates.

There are signs that piracy was becoming popular with English seamen at the turn of the sixteenth century, and that the number of depredations would have continued to increase even if the safety-valve of privateering had not been closed.

During the latter stages of the war with Spain, it had become common for captains of privateers to exceed the limits of their commissions or to ignore them completely. This was especially true in the Mediterranean where the Venetians and Tuscans suffered heavy losses at the hands of unscrupulous English marauders. In 1591, Elizabeth issued a proclamation forbidding her seamen from meddling with the shipping of these two countries, and in 1602 the drastic step was taken of banning privateers from the Mediterranean altogether. Yet once they had put to sea, these private warships were beyond government control and greedy crews often pressurised their captains to take prizes regardless of what nationality they were. In June 1603, only days before privateering was officially ended, the Earl of Salisbury was informed that:

> All sailors of late are fallen into such vile order that they shame
> not to say that they go to sea to rob all nations, and unless the
> captain consent thereto, he is not fit for this time.[1]

It was, of course, only to be expected that a period of war would be followed by an outbreak of lawlessness at sea. Because of this, certain ministers accepted the news of depredations stoically, reasoning that the problem would soon pass as things returned to normal. Salisbury himself was an advocate of this view, as was Lord Admiral Nottingham, whose observation on the outburst of piracy was that it was only to be expected that 'such loose and bad persons would be stirring'.[2]

Yet piracy was to pose a more permanent and dangerous threat than anyone could have foreseen in 1603. In the first place, there were simply more seamen who were willing to take to piracy. The total number of the English maritime population (including fishermen and wherrymen), had stood at some 16,000 in 1582. This number had been trebled by nearly two decades of war, so that by 1603 there were about 50,000 seamen who had either to find a job or starve.[3] There had been no comparable increase in peaceful employment to absorb such an increase in numbers. Expansion in the east-coast collier traffic and in the Iceland and Newfoundland fisheries had created some new jobs,

but trade with Spain had disappeared and was to take some time to become re-established. The only other new employment available was in voyages to the East Indies, which at least offered some solution to the unemployment problem, since many of the men who went on them never returned.

The spectre of unemployment and the related problem of piracy were apparent as soon as the warships were called home. In the summer of 1603 the ports and towns of England were swollen by bands of idle seamen. On 26 June (only three days after privateering had been officially ended), the mayor of Plymouth wrote to the Privy Council, describing the situation in his city:

> ... since our late Queen's death, there do daily resort heither such a great number of sailors, mariners and other masterless men, that heretofore have been at sea in men of war, and being now restrained from that course do still remain here and pester our town which is already overcharged with many poor people. And some of them do daily commit such intolerable outrages as they steal and take away boats in the night out of the harbour and rob both English and French ...[4]

This picture was repeated in most other major ports. Similar letters were received by the Council from the mayors of Bristol and Dartmouth, and things were no better in London, where opportunities for robbing vessels were more numerous.

Numbers apart, the threat from piracy was greater than ever before. The war with Spain had made men careless of life and more willing to risk all in the pursuit of easy riches. Even those who had gone on unsuccessful privateering voyages had at least been able to entertain hopes of becoming rich. Aboard privateers, seamen had grown accustomed to 'loose liberty and an undisciplined life' which they could never hope to recapture in peacetime voyages. Many seamen could not even remember the time when their country had been at peace. The end result of long years of war was to perfect the English fighting vessel and to turn the English sailor into a skilful and experienced fighting man. It was hard to ask these discharged seamen to forget their new talents just because peace had arrived.

As the war years receded, piracy showed no signs of diminish-

ing; rather the reverse. King James's own estimate of pirate strength, made in 1608, was that there were no fewer than 500 sail of pirate ships in the ocean, while another anxious observer predicted in the same year that 'where there was now one sail of pirates, within this half year for every one there would be 20'.[5] Whatever value is placed on such statements, one thing is clear: English piracy was a growing menace fast gaining momentum.

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'On the Account' in the Early Seventeenth Century

This wicked-gotten treasure
Doth him but little pleasure;
The land consumes what they have got by sea,
In drunkenness and letchery,
Filthy sins of sodomy,
Their evil-gotten goods do waste away.
– *The Seaman's Song of Captain Ward, the Famous Pyrate of the World*

Pirates were uncharacteristically reticent when it came to describing their crimes, and few would ever use the word 'piracy' where a euphemism would do just as well. Depending on individual preference and the jargon of the day, they said that they had sailed 'on warfare', 'to take purchase', 'to go roving' or simply 'to do an exploit'. No doubt they hoped that such phrases might be taken to infer legitimate privateering rather than piracy and would thereby help them exculpate their crimes. There was, however, one phrase which was synonymous with piracy. Whenever a man said he had been 'on the account', there was no mistaking exactly what he meant.

The increase of English piracy after 1603 was an all-too-obvious phenomenon. Henry Mainwaring, a famous pirate leader who wrote a discourse on piracy which was presented to the king in 1618, thought that 'there have been more Pirates by ten to one than were in the whole reign of the last Queen'. Such personal assessments should obviously be treated with care, but there is little evidence to the contrary. Nearly all those who were involved with piracy in some way or other, whether as naval captains, ship's masters, merchants or government officials, believed the threat to be greater in James's reign than it had been in Elizabeth's. There was also a noticeable change in

the character of English piracy, particularly in the Atlantic. The pirates of the early seventeenth century were more independent, better armed, better equipped, better organised and more closely-knit than ever before. They were also becoming increasingly 'international'. Operating from bases outside England, especially in Ireland and North Africa, they roamed hundreds of leagues of ocean and, with the general expansion of trading horizons, were increasingly drawn to making a profit from the waters of the New World.

The first quarter of the seventeenth century is, therefore, a particularly interesting period in which to examine the business of piracy – the men, their way of life, their ships, their tactics – in short to attempt a detailed view of pirates and their operations from the 'inside'. Such a view is bound to be circumscribed by the amount of material available. One major source of evidence is the sworn testimonies of seafaring men and others, which were painstakingly transcribed by the clerks of the High Court of Admiralty and which survive in the 'Examination Books' of that court. Many of these testimonies contain detailed information about seamanship and pirate life which are of particular interest to the historian, although to court officials at the time they must have appeared as little more than colourful irrelevancies.

A further, unexpected source of evidence is a discourse entitled *Of the Beginnings, Practices, and Suppression of Pirates*, written in 1616 or 1617 by Henry Mainwaring, one of the leading pirates of the day, as thanksgiving for his pardon. This work, practically unique in the annals of piracy, deserves to be ranked alongside that of A. O. Exquemelin, the barber's surgeon who sailed with the buccaneers in the West Indies and who described his experiences in *De Americaensche Zee-Roovers* (published some sixty years after Mainwaring's work).

Having gained an Oxford degree, Mainwaring was probably better qualified to put pen to paper than most pirates. His piratical career lasted for less than three years, from the time he left England in the summer of 1613 until his return late in 1615, but during that time he commanded a band of several hundred rovers based in Morocco and gained considerable knowledge of

the activities of pirates in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. He divided his work into sections dealing with such aspects of piracy as the beginnings of pirates, the reasons that men became pirates, pirate tactics and ports of call, and rounded the whole thing off with his own suggestions for clearing the seas. The detailed nature of parts of the work, especially the section dealing with ports of call, which reads like a Pirate's Baedeker, suggests that Mainwaring had been taking notes whilst still at sea, with a view to writing down his experiences and observations. Pirates were not usually anxious to discuss their exploits with anyone outside the fraternity. The real value of *The Discourse* is that it was written by a man who was not merely a partaker in events, but a central figure, and one who knew his subject well.

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As might be expected, most recruits to piracy were men with previous seafaring experience. In a sample of more than 700 men who were indicted for piracy in the first forty years of the seventeenth century, no less than 73% were described as sailors or mariners. If those with specialised jobs aboard ships, such as gunners, carpenters, surgeons, navigators and trumpeters are taken into account, then at least three out of every four men in this sample were experienced seamen. This still leaves a significant number whose first real experience of the sea was as pirates. Some of these were gentlemen and merchants – the 'better sort' – but many had previously gained a living from the land as yeomen, husbandmen or labourers, while still more came from urban areas where they had held down jobs as shoemakers, grocers, innkeepers, coopers, joiners and the like.

These 'landsmen' were drawn to piracy by the call of the sea and the promise of easy pickings. Some had little choice in the matter. A pirate captain who needed able-bodied men did not care too much about their seafaring qualifications and was likely to make up his numbers in the manner described by Dabone:

> . . . wanting men he invites some strangers ore
> Into his Barcke, in height of wine and game,
> He flips his anchor, and reveals his name.[1]

These were the very tactics used by Captain James Harris at
Baltimore in 1609. Roger Nottinge, a London poulterer, who
was in Ireland to visit his sister, was one of the men shanghaied
by Harris. Nottinge had gone to Baltimore with a man who
owed him money for a horse which he had sold him in London.
This man invited the unsuspecting Nottinge aboard Harris's
ship,

> . . . and there gave him good store of drinck untill he was druck
> and soe was putt into a Cabon where he slepte untill the next
> day in the morninge and then awakinge, lookinge aboute, found
> they had hoysted sayle and putt into the sea almoaste owte of
> sight of land . . .[2]

To see the attractions of piracy, one only has to examine the
alternatives that were open to seamen in early seventeenth-
century England. There was not much choice of maritime em-
ployment and although variety increased throughout the cen-
tury, in the early decades more than half of all seamen were
employed in the Iceland and Newfoundland fisheries, or in the
Newcastle coal trade. Unless he had personal influence or out-
standing ability, the common seaman was doomed to a life of
hardship and labour. Yet his employment was never guaranteed;
men were hired for a single voyage only, and when that was over
they had to idle their time away in port until they could find a
new berth. Worse still, much seaborne traffic was seasonal, and
a large part of the merchant fleet was laid up during the winter
months. Most sailors therefore had plenty of time to kill. Some
were able to get temporary jobs ashore, but many remained idle,
drinking away their money and waiting for their luck to change.
There could hardly be a better conscript to piracy than the
penniless, bored seaman.

Whether or not piracy was less arduous than legitimate em-
ployment is impossible to answer; the important point is that
many seamen believed that it was. Certainly sailors who were
press-ganged into the navy can have had little doubt on the
subject. Abuses in the early Stuart navy were legion and as a
result, conditions were deplorable. Ships were poorly victualled
in both quality and quantity of provisions and the men who

served in them were also inadequately clothed, disease-ridden and subject to a harsh and excessive code of discipline which included such sadistic refinements as keel-hauling and tongue-scraping. Desertion was common and it is almost certain that more men died from malnutrition and disease than ever died in battle.

For undergoing this hardship and torment, the sailor aboard a royal ship received 10 shillings a month – little more than half of what his counterpart on a merchantman would have received. The rate, established in 1585, remained unchanged until 1625 and even then payment could not always be relied upon. Small wonder that those with money paid to avoid being pressed – a practice which gave rise to the saying that 'the pressmaster carryeth the able man in his pocket'. Because of this the navy was often left with the scum of the ports; men who would not have been able to earn their keep aboard a pirate ship. Pirates probably looked scornfully upon the sailors in the navy as incompetent seamen who were prepared to put up with intolerable conditions for a pittance. This at least was the view of the pirate captain James Harris, who described the crew of the royal pinnace which patrolled the Irish coast as 'beinge ragged beggars, some of the people havinge sometimes amonge 100 men [not] fortie shirtes'.[3]

Freedom, companionship, food and wine in excess, riotous living – these were some of the inducements for the adventurous seaman to join a pirate ship. Yet the main attraction was plunder. The rapacious greed of seamen and their love of pillage was proverbial. Beside the thought of pillage all else paled into insignificance, for 'there is nothing that more bewitcheth them, nor anything wherein they promise to themselves so loudly nor delight in more mainly'.[4] From time to time their appetite was whetted by the outbreak of wars, when privateers were licensed to issue forth, but in peacetime no such outlet existed – unless it was piracy. The promise of plunder meant more to seamen than the simple chance of acquiring wealth and possessions. It gave them hope which enabled them to live their lives under conditions of immense hardship. In the minds of many seamen, the chance of plunder was a great gamble; an opportunity for those

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who cursed their luck and rued their lives to reverse their fortunes overnight. The conversations of seamen often revolved around half-forgotten memories and things which might have been. Such talk was the most effective defence against old age, hardship and disappointment.

The sailor's life was such that a spell in prison (even in a seventeenth-century prison) would have seemed preferable to life aboard ship. Mainwaring pointed out the futility of imprisoning seamen when 'their whole life for the most part is spent but in a running prison', a view which was later endorsed by Doctor Johnson, when he observed that:

> No man will be a sailor who has contrivance enough to get himself into a jail; for being in a ship is being in jail with the chance of being drowned . . . A man in jail has more room, better food, and commonly better company.

In practice there were no half measures for convicted pirates. To keep them in gaol for long would have been an unnecessary expense; they were either strung up or set free.

Even the gallows were not much of a deterrent to piracy. The threat was always there at the back of most pirates' minds, but then the threat of sudden death by drowning or some other disaster at sea was nothing new to most seamen. At least a rope provided a quick, clean passage out of the world – better than a slow lingering death from scurvy or the pox.

Hanging might have been a greater deterrent had it been used more often. Few of the pirates who were active during the first half of the century were captured and fewer still were hanged. King James issued pardons for pirates on several occasions and if an English pardon was not forthcoming it was not difficult to obtain one from a foreign state, particularly from Tuscany or Savoy. The government was, perhaps, unwilling to execute the full rigour of the law on all those who were known to have belonged to a pirate crew; to have done so would have been to destroy a section of the maritime population which could be relied upon as being 'the most daring and serviceable in war'.[5] Therefore, the government sometimes only sought to make an example of a few of the ringleaders, but this in turn encouraged

others to flout the law. Mainwaring wrote that he knew from his experience that men were encouraged to become pirates,

> ... by reason of a received opinion and custom is here for the most part used, that none but the Captain, Master, and it may be some few of the principal of the Company shall be put to death.

Pirate careers often began modestly on the English or Irish coasts. It was easy for a group of malcontents to board ships which lay unattended, or manned only by a skeleton crew. In his *Discourse*, Mainwaring stated that many deep-sea pirates had begun by boarding small vessels at Gravesend, Tilbury Hope or Queenborough, whence they were able to 'put to sea before a wind, so that they cannot be stayed or prevented'. In fact, many of these seizures were no more than small-time local piracy, but for a few offenders such petty piracy was 'a fundation one the ground of which wee may raise our good hap'.[6]

One surprising example has survived of just such a piracy. Jonas Prophet was a Suffolk mariner who had been bosun's mate of the *Anne Royal* in the fleet which ferried James's daughter Princess Elizabeth over to Flushing for her wedding. On his return to London, Prophet had been discharged from the navy and decided to try his luck at piracy. He was, however, captured and in 1613 lay in the Marshalsea Prison under sentence of death. Somehow he managed to escape, and allying himself with a few other determined characters, boarded a small bark of King's Lynn which lay in the Thames. Sailing this boat up the River Colne as far as Colchester, Prophet pressed two boys into his service and then put out to sea. The bark can hardly have been a seaworthy craft, but Prophet and his crew of ten eventually arrived at Mamora on the Moroccan coast, where Prophet sold the bark which had served him so well and got himself a post as master of Captain Wilkinson's pirate ship.

The ambitious pirate's first aim after capturing a small craft was normally to get control of a better ship. The area around Ushant offered opportunities for capturing seaworthy vessels of up to 200 tons, which were engaged in the local Brittany trade, and which were undermanned and could therefore be easily overpowered. These vessels included small French ships, pinks

and 'brawmes' (a kind of Dutch coasting vessel), all of which had good sailing qualities. At this stage in his career, the main advantages of the aspiring pirate were superior numbers and surprise. One effective ruse was to conceal most of the men below decks and to invent some story or other in order to get near enough to another vessel to board her. Soon after John Ward had stolen a bark from Portsmouth, he was able to take a 70-ton Frenchman off the Scillies by 'passing many houres in courteous discourse'.[7]

Similar tactics were adopted by the sixteen pirates aboard the hoy *Eagle* of Sandwich. Led by a man named Harris, whose father was keeper of the castle at 'the Mounte', they had boarded the *Eagle* by night in May 1616 as she lay at Leigh. However, they soon discovered that their prize was a mediocre vessel, for although they gave chase to many ships, they were unable to catch any. After a week of fruitless pursuit, the pirates spied the *Black Dog*, a Zealand pink. Harris ordered his men below decks and forced the skipper of the *Eagle* (whom they had kept with them) to hail the *Black Dog* and ask for water. The Dutch master seeing no harm in the request, struck his topsail and,

> ... flung out a roape willinge him [the *Eagle*'s skipper] to fasten his pott to the roape, notwithstandeinge the saied skipper steered his shippe and clapped this examinant's pinke upon her after quarter and soe soone as theye came boarde for boarde, the Engelishe boarded them.[8]

Pirates were greatly helped in these tactics by the contemporary practice of ships hailing one another at sea to discover the nationality and destination of passing vessels and also to learn the latest news. It was therefore easy for pirates to approach unsuspecting ships, especially since they were invariably in merchantmen themselves. It was difficult to distinguish between ships of different nations, and pirates collected the flags of captured ships and flew whichever one best suited their purpose. Thus they were able to get close to their prey before their identity was likely to be discovered. The near impossibility of distinguishing a pirate ship from a peaceful trader

posed considerable problems for ships' masters. In many respects the risk of being captured was greater for English shipping after 1604 than it had been in wartime, for as John Brook, master of the *Golden Dragon* of London, testified in 1609:

> ... seafareinge men are in farre greater dainger now then they were in the time of the Spanishe warres, by reason that then it was easie to know a man of warre, but now everie shalloppe is a man of warr and doethe carrie the coulors of everie nation, and soe, by devices and trickes doe gett aboarde and take merchante shipps, for that it is harde for anie to escape, insoe muche that hee beeleevethe theere have been at leaste a hundred Engelishe ships taken and pillaged within this xii moneths.[9]

Even when pirates had sufficient strength to attack merchantmen openly, the guile of their early days never deserted them. Deception was always one of the strongest weapons in the pirate's armoury. When several pirate ships were working together, they would spread out at dawn so that they appeared as innocent merchantmen plying against the wind. They carried few sails, so that they were difficult to see at a distance and would not frighten their prey away. They kept a continual lookout at the tops of their ships and had a system of signalling to communicate 'when to chase, when to give over, where to meet, and how to know each other, if they see each other afar off'. They usually waited near capes and other likely places so that they could intercept ships rather than having to chase them. One favourite trick of pirates was to work their ship as though she were in distress. Another was to hang out buckets and other 'drags' underwater when the ship was under full sail, so that it appeared to be slow and cumbersome.

Even though their ships were heavily armed, the pirates' main advantage still lay in their superiority in numbers. Only as a last resort would they attempt to batter a prize into submission and risk destroying the prize, her cargo and many of their own men in the process. They preferred to close with a ship and board her at the first opportunity, so that their fierceness and experience would win the day. Before such an attack the

pirates might shatter the self-confidence of their victims by revealing their identity with the chilling cry 'we are of the sea'. A boarding-party was a fearsome sight, calculated to frighten the enemy into surrendering. The attack by John Ward and his men on the *John Baptist* was said to be 'verie suddeine, desperate and without feare'.[10] The noise alone must have been enough to deter all but the most stout-hearted defenders. The proud crew of the Venetian argosy *Soderina* completely lost heart when faced with Ward's cut-throats at close quarters. Pirates, of course, realised their psychological advantage and exploited it to the full. Before they attacked the *Cock* of St Omer, Henry Stakes and his band loaded their guns with powder (but no shot), and then fired at the chests of the crew just to frighten them.

In battle, pirates cared little for their own safety. Most had nothing to lose and were spurred on by the thought of the plunder which they might find on board their prize. When they fought, it was usually to the death. Mainwaring remarked that he had 'seen them in fight, more willingly expose themselves to a present and certain death, than to a doubtful and long slavery'. Sometimes such reckless bravery could carry the day. When Captain Edward Jolliffe's ship was boarded by the crew of a Dutch man-of-war, he forced the Dutch to break off the action by threatening to set fire to his powder magazine and blow them all to smithereens. Captain Hills of Plymouth was not so lucky. In 1611, he and his crew of forty-five encountered three Spanish galleons and, rather than surrender, Hills fired his ship and he and his men perished in the sea, with the exception of twelve, who were rescued by the Spanish but who were suffering with severe burns.

Pirates rarely encountered much resistance because the crews of merchantmen were generally unwilling to risk their lives in defence of other men's property – property which might in any case be insured against loss. Pirates certainly looked favourably on ships which offered no resistance. It was common knowledge among seamen that anyone putting up a fight would have to pay a heavy price if they lost; whereas those who surrendered peacefully would probably be well treated and might even be allowed to continue on their way – after the rovers had ran-

sacked their ship. In 1611, the crew of the *William and Ralph* refused outright to give battle to the twenty-eight gun pirate ship of William Hughs, on the grounds that resistance could only serve to enrage the pirates and would lead to their being more harshly treated if they were captured.

For most ships' masters discretion was the better part of valour, although the master who surrendered his vessel without a fight might be accused of conspiracy. An interesting civil case was brought in the admiralty court in 1611 against Thomas Hunt, master of the *Gift of God*, who was alleged to have betrayed his ship and her lading of wheat and timber to Captain Parker, the pirate. The circumstances were that the *Gift*, which carried only four guns and was manned by ten men, was completely at the mercy of Parker's man-of-war, a 160-ton Flemish vessel which mounted twenty-three guns and had a crew of seventy. Flight was impossible – the *Gift* was fully laden, while the pirate ship, which was in any case fitted for speed, was only in ballast. Hunt called experienced witnesses to court to prove the hopelessness of his predicament. The evidence of one of these, Robert Rickman of Limehouse, thirty-six years a ship's master, is worth quoting at length for the light it throws on the accepted behaviour of the crews of merchantmen who found themselves at the mercy of pirates. To the charges levelled against Hunt, Rickman replied:

> . . . hee knowethe that pirats at sea, when theye have taken any shippe, after theie have quietly possessed themselves of that theye woulde have, theie doe eate and drincke and make merrie, and some times cause them that they have taken to doe soe allsoe, althoughe they bee taken sore againste theire will, nether can the eatinge and drinckeinge togeather bee justlie imputed to them that are taken as a presumpcion that they yeelded willingelie, for that beeinge taken, theie are glad to doe any thinge that the pirats will admitte them to please them, beeinge Captives and not at theire owne disposicion . . . hee knowethe [also] that it is the Custoome amongeste Sea faringe men of the best sorte when theie finde themselves in such dainger that they are nether able to defende themselves by fighteinge nor to saile awaie from the pirats, to yeelde and submitte themselves in hope to obtaine favor, for otherwise theye are in dainger to bee slaine or made slaves. And hee saithe that it cannot be imputed to the saied

Hunte as a faulte yf hee did yeelde, beeinge soe unable to resiste as it appearethe by the articles hee was.[11]

A typical description of an encounter with pirates was given by William Oakes, master of the *Primrose* of London, which was taken by Captain Francke in 1609:

> ... of the Northerne Cape [of Spain], a shippe of warre gave chase to them and comeinge neere them, this examinant and Companie called to them to beare up and they answeared that they woulde not beare up for the proudeste merchaunte in the Sea, and putt out in theire lower teere thirteene peeces of ordenance and commaunded this examinant and companie to hoise out theire boate ...

This was normal procedure for most pirates. First they ordered the merchant, master or principal officers of their prize to board their ship and once they held them captive, a boarding party was sent to search the ship. With their hostages secure, the pirates could examine their prize at leisure and set about looting it systematically. The two vessels might remain together for days (on one occasion they were even tied together), and the ship would be released only after the pirates had finished looting her. The pirates would check bills of lading to see that none of the cargo had been concealed and question the crew of their prize to make sure that no money or items of value had been hidden.

Pirates frequently tortured their captives if they thought they were being cheated. Sometimes they tortured them simply for amusement. John Downes and his men, suspecting that the *Royal* of Leith had money hidden on board, whipped the master and two young boys and further tormented them by tightening knotted cords around their heads. These methods evidently met with success, for recorded amongst Downes's loot are six bags of reals-of-eight worth £400. Another favourite torture used by pirates was to place lighted matches under the fingernails of their victims and let them burn down. Whipping and beating were more obvious methods of intimidation, but Captain Stephenson showed considerable enterprise when he gave a carpenter the choice between joining his crew and being 'shot off

in a piece of ordinance'. William Baughe was particularly ruthless in his search for plunder. Learning that more than £3,000 in cash was concealed aboard a Flemish ship which had fallen into his hands, he straightway seized hold of one of the petrified crew and 'sawed his throte with a dagger untill the blood ran downe'. On rare occasions it was the pirates themselves who had to suffer the pain and indignity of being tortured. When some Flemish rovers captured Captain Francke, they were reported to have,

> ... spoyled him of all his welth, and also burned his fingers' endes of, and tormented him otherwise by the privy members, and many others of his company in most cruell maner . . .[12]

Once pirates had looted a vessel, they divided the booty on some agreed basis, often after the fashion of privateers, each member of the crew receiving a certain number of shares in accordance with his outlay in the venture and his office in the ship. Bravery in battle was probably an important factor in determining individual rewards. Geoffrey Wiseman, who served with Ward in the Mediterranean, said that he had 'such shares allowed him by the quarter masters, sometymes more, and sometymes lesse, as they thought he deserved'. A division of the loot could be made at any time, depending on the strength of the captain and the greediness of the crew. The pay-off was certainly not a matter of every man for himself and there are indications that it proceeded in an orderly fashion. When the *Golden Lion* of Lübeck was captured in 1607, one of the pirates named Morgan was made 'purse bearer, and the money was brought unto him by the company as they receaved yt'.[13]

A pirate's most prized possession was his ship. It clearly carried a great deal of prestige, particularly in the eyes of other pirates, and the captain who commanded a poor vessel ran the risk of being deserted by his crew. In 1604, Bishop and his men were at Sallee in the *Blessing*, recovering from a fight with a Spanish warship, when John Ward sailed into port, whereupon Bishop's men, 'seeing the said Warde and companie to be well shipped and full of monie lefte the Blessinge and went into Captaine Ward's shippe'.[14]

Pirates had the choice of whatever ships they could capture. In practice this usually meant merchant vessels which could then be adapted to suit their own purposes. Often they re-christened their men-of-war (as they liked to call them) with such appropriate names as the *Gift*, the *Ambition*, the *Why Not I?* or the *Mamora*. Pirate ships could often keep the seas for many months at a time, since they simply helped themselves to provisions and equipment from vessels which they chanced to meet at sea. Even if a merchantman was not carrying a rich cargo the pirates could still rob her of victuals, drink, cables, sails, arms, ordnance, powder, shot and anything else that they needed, as well as goods that took their fancy, such as the clothes and personal possessions of the crew.

Pirates had a seaman's eye for a good vessel. The main qualities they looked for were speed, sturdiness (pirate vessels often had to mount large numbers of heavy guns), stability in rough seas, a shallow draught for inshore work and, of course, general seaworthiness. The type of vessel which came closest to fulfilling all these criteria was the Dutch *fluyt* or flyboat. Mainwaring appreciatively noted that Flemish bottoms 'go well, are roomy ships, floaty, and of small charge'.

The flyboat was the most successful carrying vessel of the day and soon became outstandingly popular, especially for use in the bulk trades of northern Europe. Introduced in the 1590s flyboats were launched in great numbers during the twelve-year truce between Holland and Spain (1609–21). To all appearances the flyboat was a very businesslike trader. It was a single-decked, shallow-draught vessel with three masts, square-rigged and designed to be handled by a small crew. Flyboats had no figure-heads, a minimum of decoration and had few or no gun-ports. In certain respects they represented a new departure in ship-building design. At the start of the seventeenth century many ships were still basically 'round' vessels with lofty upperworks, which made them cumbersome and unstable in rough seas. In contrast, the flyboat was a long ship (its length measuring anything from four to six times its width) and this, together with the absence of any lofty structures fore and aft, gave the ship very desirable sailing properties.

The qualities which contributed to the success of the flyboat as a trader have, perhaps, served to obscure its suitability as a 'man-of-war' – one authority even went so far as to describe it as being 'about as warlike as a coal-scuttle'.[15] In fact the reverse was true; the flyboat was a very fast vessel indeed. For example, the master of one London merchantman described how the 250-ton flyboat of Captain Hughs, mounting twenty-eight cannon and six fowling pieces, 'sayleth from us with halfe their sayles'.[16] Or again, in 1609, a squadron of ships was sent out from Madeira to give chase to Captain Francke's Flemish man-of-war, only to find that the pirates 'made no reckoninge of them, beinge verie swifte of saile'.[17]

The structural strength of flyboats and their bulk-carrying capacity were also of great importance to pirates. The space below decks could accommodate a considerable number of men – there were usually at least fifty and sometimes more than a hundred in a pirate crew – while the ship was designed to be handled by only a few men in the normal course of trade, which left most pirates a free hand when going into battle. The sturdy build of the hull enabled the ship to carry the added weight of extra ordnance that was common among pirate vessels. Many pirate ships carried between twenty and thirty cannon, which had usually been acquired from captured merchantmen. Their fire-power was thus far greater than that of normal trading vessels and on a par with heavily-armed merchantmen which went on naval expeditions during the period. Ward's flyboat mounted 32 cast guns and was manned by 100 men, while Stephenson's *Prong* and Hussey's *Black Raven* were both of 200 tons, mounted 28 guns, and were crewed by 50 men. Robinson's *Bull, Bear and Horse* was armed with 4 brass cannon, 15 iron pieces and 5 or 6 'murderers'. And none of the merchantmen employed in the naval expedition against Algiers (1620) was greater than 300 tons burden or carried more than 26 iron guns.

Pirates were expert at adapting merchantmen for a more war-like role. One interesting account has survived of conversion work which was carried out on the *Flying Cow* of Amsterdam by Robert Russel, ship's carpenter with Captain Robert Stephenson, who:

... caused xx portes to be cutt out, having but foure before, and made her a sparre decke abaste the maine mast, and newe gratinges round about withinborde, and rayled her round about, and also made her a newe misen maste, and new repayred her and furnished her with sayles, rigging and other necessaries to his great chardges . . .[18]

The size of the vessel favoured by pirates was not large – most of their flyboats were in the region of 160–250 tons burden. The effectiveness of a pirate ship did not depend on its size. Small vessels were often swifter and more manoeuvrable than ships of greater tonnage. For example, the *Phoenix*, Captain Saxbridge's ship, was only 35 tons burden, yet she was evidently a very useful craft. She had made voyages to Guinea and the West Indies and was described as 'a longe shippe her burthen considered . . . draweth little water and hath good rome for stowidge of men'.[19]

A ship which remained at sea for any length of time would eventually begin to 'grow foul', that is to say that barnacles and other deposits would build up on the hull, impairing sailing qualities and eventually destroying the timbers. To maintain their ships in good order, pirates needed to careen or grave them regularly. Such operations had to be carried out speedily and in secret, for at such times the pirates were exposed to attack by land and sea. By necessity they were expert at such work. John Jennings managed to grave his ship at Mevagissey in only twenty-four hours and was back at sea again before anyone realised what had happened. Occasionally things went wrong and the rovers were caught with their ships' bottoms up, which is what befell Lambert Bastfield, the Liverpudlian pirate captain, who was surprised by Dutch warships while graving his vessel in a remote bay in Ireland.

Speed and convenience of careening was another reason that pirates preferred vessels of more modest size. The lighter a vessel was, the easier it was to haul it on its side and careen it. With ships of greater burden – say over 500 tons – careening was difficult, if not impossible, and for really effective repairs a dry dock was necessary. Pirates, of course, had no dry docks. They are known to have taken prizes as big as 500 tons,

but do not seem to have used these ships as their men-of-war.

Another practical reason why the Atlantic pirates in particular needed small ships, was because the bar at the entrance to Mamora, their main retreat, did not permit passage to ships of more than about 300 tons burden.

Contemporaries were at pains to portray pirates as a desperate rabble held together only by a common lust for riches. John Smith's description of them as 'riotous, quarrelous, treacherous, blasphemous and villanous' was reassuring for more law-abiding seamen, for it showed pirates as disorganised and dis-united and therefore presenting less of a threat than they really did. This was also the impression given by Admiral Monson in his *Naval Tracts*, in which he describes an alliance between two English pirates, Thomas Tucker and John Woodland, *alias* Monnocho. These two had planned a voyage of plunder to the 'Seven Islands' of Russia, but had only sailed as far as the Faroes when Tucker's ship was wrecked in a storm. Woodland turned the misfortune to his own favour and robbed Tucker, having 'no more pity of him than of a Spaniard, who were most obnoxious to pirates in those days'. From this incident, Monson was able to draw the comforting moral that there was no honour or trust between pirates; that 'the condition of such people is never to be constant or honest longer than their devilish humours hold'.

Pirates, of course, often did conform to this picture of treachery and deceit. There was certainly no love lost between the anti-Spanish pirates of the Atlantic, who were well disposed towards English shipping, and those of the Mediterranean who renounced their country and their religion and who treated English vessels no differently from those of any other nation. In 1608 the news was out that 'there ys great hatred betwixt Ward and theym [Bishop, Jennings and other pirates operating in the Atlantic], and nothing but death will appease theyr quarrell yf they chance to meete one with the other'.[20]

Both of these groups had their fair share of internal conflict. For example, thirty of Ward's followers escaped with one of his prizes in 1606, and a few years later another group of mal-

contents deserted him and offered their services to the Maltese. In the Atlantic, Peter Easton's career began in earnest after he had quarrelled with Captain Richard Robinson and made off in one of his prizes. Easton, in his turn, inspired little devotion from his own men. While he was on the American coast in 1612, several hundred of his followers deserted, and he also had trouble keeping order in his band – at one time two of his chief officers fell out and had to be put in separate ships to keep them apart.

One of the most frequent causes of conflict amongst pirates was the division of spoils. Captain Robinson's crew once carried his ship to sea because they feared that their captain and a few intimates were planning to cheat them out of their fair share of the plunder. Disagreements between officers and ordinary members of the crew over how to apportion the loot were probably a major bone of contention. Captain John Johnson was so scared of his own men, who believed that he had cheated them, that he locked up their muskets in the bread-room of his ship.

Anyone familiar with the novels of Robert Louis Stevenson would expect pirate behaviour to be characterised by treachery, desertion and squabbling. However, during the early part of the seventeenth century it is also possible to observe a remarkable degree of harmony amongst English pirates, and especially amongst those operating in Atlantic waters.

The pirates of the Atlantic were moulded into what can loosely be termed 'a pirate confederation'. Within this confederation at any one time there might be as many as thirty to forty ships and a thousand or so men. Overall control was in the hands of an 'admiral' and other prominent leaders were glorified with such titles as 'vice-admiral' and 'rear-admiral'. The whole command structure was fairly informal and had arisen to a large extent as a result of patronage. When a captain took a prize, he would man her with some of his own crew and place one of his most trusted men in command. This man would then, in effect, become captain of his own ship and, if he took any prizes, would be expected to repay his old captain's generosity. Francke, for example, was given his first command by Robert Stephenson, and soon repayed his debt by handing one of his prizes over to

Stephenson, who rated her so highly that he made her his new man-of-war. New commanders were sometimes appointed on a percentage basis of prize money. For example, Captains Millington and Walker both handed their loot to William Baughe, in return for which they were to receive a third of the total value of all booty captured by the consortium.

Not all captains were so generous in giving prizes to underlings and captured ships were often used as pinnaces, for sighting prizes and giving assistance in battle. More suspicious captains even restricted the food allowance of men aboard these consorts, so that they would not be tempted to go off and try their luck on their own.

Pirates appear often to have elected their leaders democratically. Some captains are known to have been chosen by their crew and Richard Bishop was reported to have been 'elected' as supreme commander of the pirate confederation. Without the support of his crew a pirate captain must have been very insecure. Neither were the decisions of an unsuccessful leader likely to go unchallenged for long. For example, in 1607, Captain Owen, brother-in-law to Sir Richard Hawkins, vice-admiral of Devon, left Plymouth to go on the account. It was not long, however, before his crew of eighty mutinied and elected another captain.

The men themselves appear to have been fairly free to come and go as they pleased and probably drifted from ship to ship. One man was known to have been steward to Jennings, Easton and Francke. Bishop, as admiral, actually assigned men to specific ships and if captains were in need of men – particularly specialists such as carpenters or surgeons – they could borrow them from other pirate ships. The mobility of men within the fleet no doubt not only depended on the relationships between individual captains and the needs of the moment, but also on the wishes of the men themselves.

Ships and goods were continually changing hands in the fleet and this necessitated some general acceptance of ownership and credit. In 1610, Captain Parker sold a three-quarter share in his ship, the *Black Raven*, to Thomas Hussey, who then assumed the captaincy. Hussey died early the following year in a touching

scene in his cabin, surrounded by all the captains of the fleet, in whose presence he left his ship and all his goods to William Hughs, his lieutenant – a fact which was generally acknowledged throughout the pirate band. Pirates had a regard for one another's possessions which would have satisfied the most meticulous lawyer. On the death of Captain Peters, it was reported that he had 'made Captain Myagh his executer and lefte him his shippe and goods', worth in excess of £6,000.[21] Goods may have been come by unlawfully, but the right of ownership amongst pirates was often scrupulously defined.

In some respects the Atlantic pirates exhibited some of the camaraderie which was to characterise the 'Brotherhood of the Coast' in the West Indies in the latter half of the century. No doubt their organisation was unsophisticated compared with that of the buccaneers – no indications have been found of any formal code dealing with details such as penalties for stealing from shipmates, or indemnity for specific injuries sustained in battle – but there are signs of a system of punishment reminiscent of that of the buccaneers. On one occasion Captain Baughe was intent on executing one of his men, George Lea, who had assaulted him, but Baughe's crew refused to allow their captain to have his way and instead Lea was towed to the mouth of the pirates' harbour in a rowing boat with one oar and some water, and was formally cast out from the pirate community.

Some captains may have devised codes of behaviour that were not altogether welcomed by rough seafarers. For example, one pirate crew had a man on board whom they called 'thair parsone, for saying of prayeris to thame twyse a day'[22] – an early glimpse of the kind of rigid sabbatarianism that was to be enforced by the notorious Bartholomew Roberts more than a century later.

Although pirate ships often congregated in great strength in their own harbours, once at sea they usually hunted in twos and threes. In this way they had more chance of surprising their prey. They could also spread their net wider and, if their luck was in, shares would be that much larger. If merchants had been faced with the threat of a large band of pirates cutting trade routes, their ships would not have put to sea at all (as happened
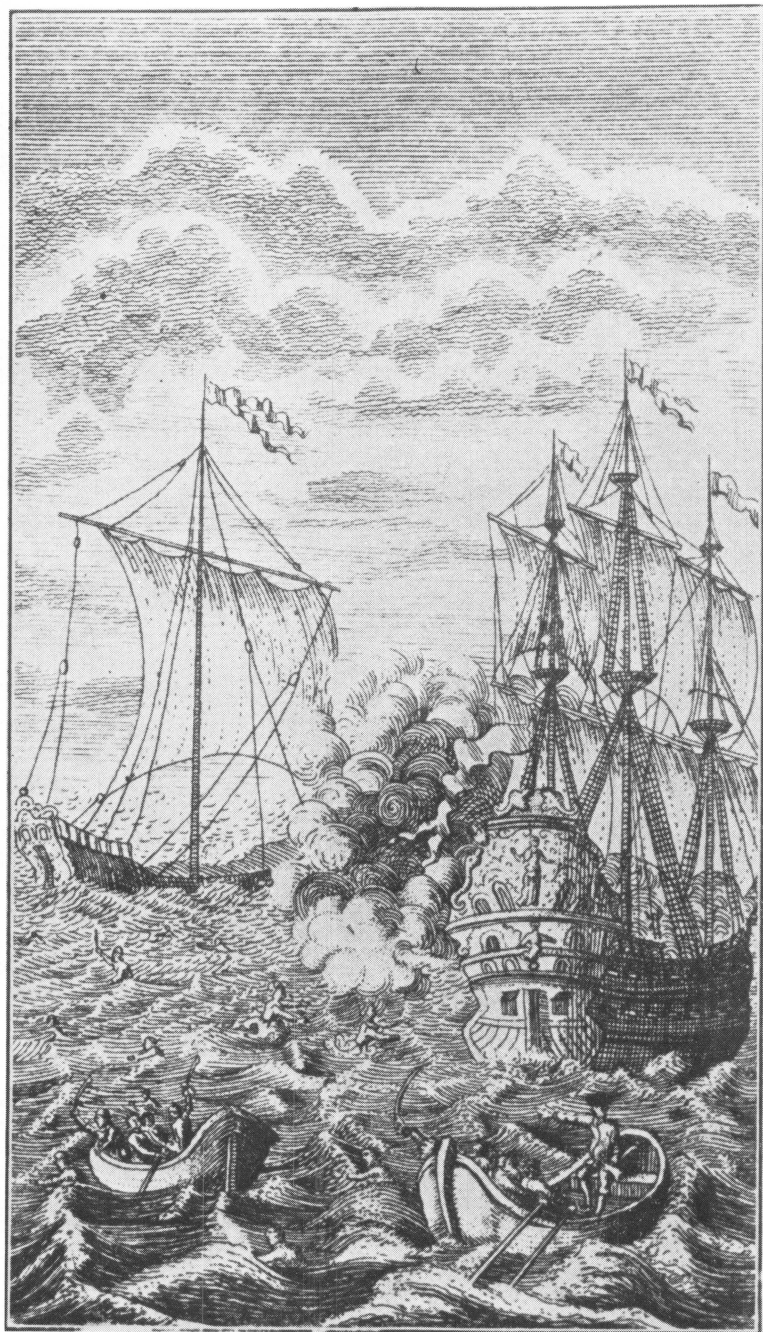
Catching a Tartar: a pirate attack is roughly handled by Spaniards in the western Mediterranean

A
TRVE AND
CERTAINE RE-
port of the Beginning, Proceedings,
Ouerthrowes, and now present Estate of Cap-
taine WARD and DANSEKER, the two late
famous Pirates : from their first setting
foorth to this present time.

AS ALSO

The firing of 25. Saile of the *Tunis,* men of
warre : Together with the death of diuers
of WARDS chiefe Captaines.

Published by *Andrew Barker* Master of a Ship,
who was taken by the Confederates of *Ward,*
and by them some time detai-
ned Prisoner.

LONDON.

Printed by *William Hall,* and are to be sold
by *Iohn Helme* at his shop in S. Dunstans
Church-yard. 1609.

Establishment propaganda. Title page of the catalogue of misdeeds committed
by the pirates Ward and Danseker, published in 1609

in 1609 when losses in the Mediterranean were so heavy that English trade to the Straits was brought to a standstill). Furthermore, the existence of a large number of pirate ships would only have invited strong naval retaliation – something which was unlikely so long as there was no single worthwhile 'objective'.

On their own, the strongest pirate ships were a match for all but naval vessels and the best merchantmen – East Indiamen and ships of the Spanish Plate Fleet. On one occasion Easton fired a small French warship and engaged a larger one (although he failed to take her), and Mainwaring, with only two or three vessels, 'put off' four or five ships of the Spanish navy, forcing them to take refuge in Lisbon, after a hard engagement that lasted throughout Midsummer's Day 1615.

Faced with a common enemy, the rovers were quick to unite or give assistance to one another. When Captain Williamson, commander of a royal ship, opened fire on Saxbridge's pirate vessel at Baltimore, he soon had reason to regret his action, for the pirate ships of Jennings and Easton sailed menacingly up to his ship and forced him to break off the action. The English were also ready to combine to meet threats from foreign rovers. In 1610 Dutch pirates seized Baughe's ship and goods and later that year they also robbed Francke and cruelly tortured him and his men. As a result of these incidents five English captains banded together to seek revenge. They engaged the Dutch rovers at Mamora and a fierce battle ensued lasting three days. Three English captains (Hussey, Plumley and Parker) were slain, but the Dutch suffered even heavier losses and were finally defeated.[23]

The unity and strength which appears amongst pirates at this time is difficult to explain. Probably it owes something to the fact that many of the rovers saw their depredations in a patriotic light, continuing the war against the natural enemy, Spain. Certainly many of them gave preferential treatment to English vessels which fell into their hands. Their cohesion may also owe something to the fact that they were all outlaws from England, living in a practically self-contained community, who were drawn into one another's company for safety and companionship.

C

Pirates had their own ports where they congregated in strength and were able to indulge their tastes to a greater or lesser extent, depending on their relations with the local inhabitants. Various ports such as Tunis, Algiers, Leghorn and Villefranche all tolerated English pirates at one time or another, but pirates could expect to find an equally warm welcome in remote coastal settlements in Ireland, Africa or even in England. The population in such areas was only too willing to relieve the monotony of everyday existence by entertaining rovers, particularly if they had money to spend and tales to tell. Even sailors of English trading vessels who encountered pirates in foreign harbours were often quite prepared to exchange gifts or 'make merry' with them.

When describing the kind of lives which pirates led, it is important to remember that they were not a race apart. Many began as ordinary seamen and drifted in and out of piracy, returning to England to visit their friends and relatives, or taking spells of legitimate employment. There was probably little to choose between a seamen's tavern in London or Plymouth and a drinking house in Leamcon or Mamora. Pirates differed from most seafarers only in that they were perhaps more reckless and adventurous and had more time and money to indulge themselves.

One of the most attractive qualities of pirates was their arrogance and gall. In an age when many men believed in the Divine Right of Kings, it is refreshing to see Sockwell proclaim himself 'King of Lundy' or to hear Easton demanding why he should accept a royal pardon when he was king in his own domain. In a contemporary ballad, John Ward says of King James: 'If he reign king of all the land, I will reign king at sea'.[24]

The appearance of these 'pirate kings' is sketchy, but no doubt they were impressive in a crude kind of way. Pierce, a captain in the Mediterranean, was said to be a fearsome man with an 'angry countenance',[25] and Easton's appearance was described as 'rude and savadge'.[26] No doubt sheer physical strength was a great attribute for a pirate leader. Captain Alexander Vaughan was 'a greate and tall bigge thick man'[27] and Captain Woolworth was 'a tall man, and well set, and hath

a blacke head and bearde, and weareth a longe locke on one side of his head'.[28]

What many pirates lacked in stature they could make up for in their dress. These early English pirates, like Blackbeard later on, often cultivated their own individual image. John Exton, for example, was well known because he always dressed entirely in green, and 'Black Will' got his name from his black hair and apparel. Such extroverts might be expected to have made the most of the clothes and ornaments that came their way. Kit Oloard must have made a spectacular picture, 'dressed in black velvet trousers and jacket, crimson silk socks, black felt hat, brown beard, and shirt collar embroidered in black silk'.[29] Pirate wardrobes might contain clothes, jewellery and other ornaments whose origin was European, African, Mediterranean or even Eastern. Many renegades adopted Arabic dress, such as Sir Francis Verney, whose turban, pelisses and curly-toed slippers were returned to England on his death. Ward was said to 'live like a bashaw in Barbary' and he and his followers abandoned the English fashion for long beards and either clipped their beards very short or went clean-shaven. In an age which was famous for extravagance in dress, pirates were amongst the most colourful – if not always the most tasteful – of dressers.

The rigours of shipboard life made pirates willing to take whatever opportunities for entertainment came their way. Gambling was probably common both at sea and on shore. Backgammon (or 'tables' as it was then called), was popular in pirate circles and dice was also a common gambling game. After John Johnson and his men plundered the *Black Buck* of Enkhuizen, Philip Smith won 680 out of a total haul of 800 silver dollars playing dice with his shipmates. Cards must also have been a popular way to while away time and money, and packs of playing cards were in demand at Mamora.

Music must have provided welcome relaxation, but there is scarcely any indication of what form it took or what songs the pirates sang. Perhaps they sang about one another's exploits – at least one ballad about John Ward survives, although it is not known whether it was popular with pirates. Probably they

sang well-known songs of the day and maybe their repertoire included foreign ditties which they had acquired on their travels or learnt from captives (not a few English pirates were multi-lingual). The importance attached to music is suggested by one unique reference to musical diversions aboard a pirate ship. Captain Stephenson, who was 'daunceinge on boarde the Phillip Bonaventure in Mamora harbor', commanded Baptista Ingle, a member of another pirate crew, to 'winde his whistle'. Ingle accordingly played a tune for the dancing captain, who was so delighted with his playing that he refused to let him leave the ship.

Pirates spent a great deal of time drinking. Prolonged drinking bouts were an almost mandatory way of celebrating a successful cruise – from Ward and his men running drunk through the streets of Tunis, to Captain Robinson and his crew celebrating at Baltimore in 'most riotous manner'.[30] Drinking was frequently taken to excess. One man testified that when he was at Mamora the pirates paid him forty ducats, because 'he attended uppon them, and did many base offices for them when they were druncke and disordered themselves'.[31] Pirates at Mamora also took opium, which was brought to them by merchants who came there to trade. Yet they seem to have reserved their riotous behaviour and debauchery for when they came ashore and neither drink nor drugs appear to have been detrimental to their effectiveness at sea.

After months cooped up aboard ship, women were in great demand. Prostitutes were ferried from all over Britain to Ireland, where they did brisk business, and not a few men must have contracted the same disease as Nicholas Thompson, who was 'very ill of burneinge by whoores'.[32] Women captured at sea could expect little mercy from pirates. In May 1623 John Nutt and his crew stopped a bark at the entrance to Dungarvan harbour which was carrying a dozen or more women, all of whom 'were ravished by the pyrates' company'. Mrs Jones, the wife of a Cork saddler, particularly took the fancy of the pirate captain, who carried her to his cabin 'and there had her a week'.[33] Pirates, however, do not appear to have taken females to sea with them. Presumably their presence was considered too dis-

tracting, although captains may sometimes have stretched the rules to suit their own convenience. One of the more interesting crew members aboard Captain Barry's ship when it anchored at Berehaven was a negro wench.

Many pirates were family men who did their best to maintain their dependants while they were overseas. Some moved their families so they would be able to see more of them; the wives of some English rovers settled in Munster and others, whose husbands held Dutch commissions, moved to Holland. It was common practice for pirates to send money home to their families by means of English ships which they met at sea. For example, John Ward and Anthony Johnson entrusted the master of the *Husband* with £200 in Barbary gold to deliver to their wives. Such gifts were clearly illegal, but the womenfolk of pirates expected them as of right. On one occasion the marshal of the admiralty court was accosted by some irate wives who had not received the gold which their pirate husbands had sent them.

Pirates, like other seamen, were in a good position to have more than one wife. Ward had a wife in Tunis and a wife in England, and William Pierce, the son of a rich Plymouth man, was married to a Turkish girl. Michael Powel kept two wives in England, one at Ratcliffe and the other at Plymouth, which was perhaps why he stayed at Tunis for so long. Probably pirates' families suffered no more than those of other seamen, particularly if some provision was made for them. Richard Robinson gave £160 to his brother to invest for his two children and the interest was sent regularly to his wife at Plymouth. Even if a pirate's wife and children were deserted, this was no worse than the fate of many other seamen's wives. At least piracy carried no social stigma and a pirate's family were just as likely to receive help as to be victimised.

The rewards of piracy could be fantastic. Easton retired to Savoy with a fortune that was conservatively valued at 100,000 crowns, received a pension of £4,000 a year, built himself a palace and lived the life of an Italian courtier. Ward's wealth was probably even greater; one of his prizes alone, the *Soderina*, was sold for 70,000 crowns. Such riches enabled Ward to live at

Tunis in the style of an oriental potentate, in a 'faire Palace beautified with rich Marble and Alabaster Stones'.[34]

Ward and Easton were unquestionably the most successful pirates of their day, but many other captains amassed wealth which, by contemporary standards, amounted to a fortune. When John Jennings surrendered to the Earl of Thomond, his 300-ton vessel contained 150 chests of sugar, thirty-six cases of cinnamon and twelve packs of pepper. Among his personal possessions were pearls, clusters of rubies and diamonds, Spanish silver, £40 in doubloons and a waistband quilted with over £400 of Barbary gold – and all this besides £2,000 worth of merchandise which he had deposited elsewhere. Four-figure fortunes were not exceptional amongst pirate captains and such wealth could be gained by the capture of one rich prize.

Some pirates managed to smuggle their booty into England. One man who came ashore with jewels concealed about his person was foolish enough to boast that his breeches were as rich as the lord admiral's. Captain Thomas Tompkins brought home £2,600 in silver (his share of the capture of the *Black Balbiana* of Venice), and when he was finally recognised and arrested some seven years afterwards, claimed that he had given 1,000 marks to his brother to procure a pardon. Thomas Sockwell said he had offered as much as £20,000 for a pardon, and although such a sum may seem incredible, the king himself told the Venetian ambassador that he had received an offer of £40,000 for a pardon from a pirate. Sockwell had apparently got his money from the capture of a carvel near the Azores which he had sold at Mamora for £40,000. Whether or not his wealth was as great as he pretended, Sockwell was evidently very rich, for he was travelling the country wearing two gilded waistcoats full of gold and carrying a 'cloak bag' which contained two or three thousand pounds in cash.

Some pirates were able to enjoy their ill-gotten gains in safe retirement. Under the terms of the general pardon of 1612, pirates who surrendered were allowed to keep all their loot. One of these pirates, Captain Baughe, whose ship and goods were confiscated by the naval captain Sir William St John, actually sued St John for the recovery of his booty – apparently success-

fully, for a note dated March 1616 specifies payments made to the pirate since December 1613 in part payment of a sum of £2,586. Bishop also had a prosperous retirement. It is not clear whether his pardon permitted him to retain all of his plunder, which must have been considerable (his share of the *Margaret* of Morbihan alone amounted to £1,000), but he was clearly not hard up, for he settled at Leamcon and built a house there 'after the English fation'.[35]

The captain and principal officers invariably took the lion's share of the loot – anything from a third to a half of the total. The rest was distributed amongst the ordinary crew members and shares were not spectacular. For example, on a prize realising £2,000 there might be £1,000 left after the captain and his henchmen had taken their cut. Assuming there were a hundred men in the crew, each man's share would be only £10. For the capture of *Our Lady of the Conception*, a ship laden with Brazil wood and spices worth about £3,500, the crew received only £10 a man. Thomas Mitton, who was at the capture of the *Soderina*, had £60 as his share; very few pirate hands ever got more from a single prize. Even so, piracy paid far better than legitimate employment. Sailors on merchantmen could not expect much more than £10 a year, whereas a pirate could hope to make as much from one prize and, in addition, the pirate could also look forward to clothes, weapons and other possessions that he could pillage from the crews of captured ships.

Of course, the unsuccessful pirate got nothing and many soon dissipated what little they had. Four years after Mainwaring's crew had received an English pardon, they were reported to be in 'a wretched condition'.[36] Easton's men, on the other hand, were reduced to poverty by the treachery of their leaders. Only a month after their surrender at Villefranche, the English agent in Savoy reported that Easton 'hath quitted most part of his company and (for good example I thinke) sent them begging homewards: himself and the rest heere are gallant in variety of clothes and colours'.[37]

It may have been difficult for an ex-pirate to get a job at sea again. Thomas Tucker, who sailed with Easton and who received an English pardon in 1616, found difficulty in getting a

berth, 'his credit being lost, which made him unfit for employ-ment'. Yet such recognition was perhaps exceptional and Tucker eventually managed to find a job.[38] On the whole, it seems un-likely that the law-abiding seaman was in any better position than the impoverished pirate.

Therefore, with a few brilliant exceptions, the majority of pirates failed to make their fortunes. Most of them, however, spent only a few years in piracy and never suffered for their crimes. They cannot be described as failures, since being a sea-man in seventeenth-century England meant being doomed to a miserable life in any case. There is a danger of over-reacting against the popular romantic image of piracy. Pirates were not all squalid thieves who ended up penniless and dissolute. Many brought considerable flair to their trade. Certainly there was a profusion of all the vices normally associated with piracy – drunkenness, whoring, gambling, fighting, torture and general debauchery – but pirates did not have a monopoly of such things. What is surprising are the qualities of order and organisa-tion which existed, especially amongst the pirates of the At-lantic, and the moderation which English pirates often exercised in committing their spoils. This was, perhaps, one of the main reasons that they were able to defy capture by all nations and to maintain their power at sea for as long as they did.

2
Pirate Hunting Grounds

No man is a pirate unless his contemporaries agree to call him so.
– Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in *Table Talk*

English pirates became established in two main areas – the Mediterranean and the North Atlantic. Although there were some points of contact between those operating in the two seas, they were essentially separate from one another.

The main centre for English pirates in the Mediterranean was Tunis, although some also worked from Algiers. They were especially active in the eastern Mediterranean, and preyed on the shipping of all christian nations without exception. Gradually their operations became increasingly subject to Turkish control, and many of them eventually entered service with the Turks.

The pirates of the North Atlantic were a different breed of men. They enjoyed greater independence than their counterparts in the Mediterranean and operated from bases in Morocco and southern Ireland, over which they exercised virtual control. Many of these rovers acted as though the Elizabethan war had never ended, concentrating their attacks against the Spaniards, and showing favour to British vessels which fell into their hands.

Because of their dissimilarities, these two groups of pirates were seen in very different lights by contemporaries at home. The renegades of the Mediterranean were regarded as the more fascinating and evil. They had turned their backs forever on their country and their religion and, if they had not actually 'turned Turk', they had certainly added to the miseries and sufferings of countless christian slaves in the bagnios of the Turkish regencies. By comparison, the crimes of the Atlantic rovers were venial, since most of them had confined their depredations to foreign shipping. These essential differences were recognised by the pirates themselves and helped to create some feeling of hostility between the two groups.

Acts of piracy were not, of course, restricted to the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. Depredations by the English were reported at various times in most parts of the globe. In 1612, the wisdom of sending an embassy to Persia was questioned, because it was said that English ships and sailors 'so often turn pirates in remote countries'.[1] The events of the following year lend some substance to this view, for English and Flemish bertons were marauding in the Red Sea and the Turks were reported to be constructing galleys to meet the threat. The West Indies and Spanish America held a special attraction for would-be pirates and were the scene of several outrages, as for example when several of the captains on Sir Walter Raleigh's expedition to the Orinoco in 1618 deserted to become pirates. The waters of the East Indies (in the seventeenth century the name was often used to mean all land east of Africa) also provided a promising hunting-ground. In 1615, for example, Sir John Fearne and a band of Englishmen were at Brest, preparing for an East Indies voyage. They carried the king of France's commission to trade in the area, but it was generally supposed that 'their chiefest end and ayme is to committ some piracy or outrage at sea in those partes'.[2]

There was, however, considerable confusion over what actually constituted piracy in these distant seas. In 1494, the Spanish and Portuguese had agreed, in a magnificently arrogant gesture, to divide the New World (then largely undiscovered) between themselves, and to exclude all other nations from going west of an imaginary north-south line drawn through the Azores. This agreement was sanctioned by the pope by an instrument called a 'Bull of Donation'. It may have had some significance in 1494, when all the maritime powers of northern Europe were Catholic, but it was hardly relevant in the seventeenth century, particularly when countries such as England and Holland no longer recognised the pope's authority. The Spanish, however, clung tenaciously to their grandiose claims and denounced all interlopers who ventured 'beyond the line' as *piratas,* while England and the other maritime nations ignored Spanish claims and continued their voyages of exploration and discovery regardless.

Thus, piracy beyond the line defied definition, or was at best susceptible to many differing interpretations. Nor can depredations in the disputed seas be treated as piracy in the strict sense, because most of the ships which perpetrated the outrages were not pirate ships proper, but traders and merchantmen which combined business with plunder. Given the conditions of undeclared war existing beyond the line, governments were understandably reluctant to condemn their errant seamen as pirates.

Therefore, while piracy in European waters was well-defined and laws were enforced with a considerable degree of international co-operation, beyond the line nothing was certain – except the rule of force. It was generally accepted that spoils which would have been piracy east of the Azores could be easily justified if committed west of the islands. In 1605, Sir Ferdinando Gorges wrote to the Earl of Salisbury suggesting measures to curb piracy in European waters, but he specifically advised against taking similar action to curb depredations west of the Azores and the Canaries,

> For beyond those Isles it is not known that his Majesty has league or alliance neither may his subjects trade with any of those people but at their hazard and extreme adventure, and therefore those the less to be excepted against for their enterprises.[3]

During the first part of the seventeenth century English pirates were mainly active in the waters east of the Azores. Occasionally they visited the eastern seaboard of North America and sometimes even strayed as far south as the West Indies, but for the most part they took their plunder off the western seaboard of Europe. This made sense, for they not only avoided the dangerous conditions prevailing in the disputed seas, but were still well placed to intercept trans-oceanic as well as European commerce. It is therefore the operations of English pirates in two areas, the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, which form the focal point of piracy during the period with which this book is concerned.

Apart from these 'deep-sea' pirates, there were other scavengers

active nearer home. Many ships and small boats were captured or plundered near the British coast in the first half of the seventeenth century. Some of the more ambitious robbers saw such spoils as an opportunity to increase their strength in order to graduate to piracy on the high seas, but most were content to seize whatever they could and get back safely to the shore. Coastal and river piracy could be a lucrative business, and although the prizes might be smaller than those captured on the high seas, fewer men were needed and the loot could be disposed of quickly on the British market. This type of piracy will be studied in one area where it was rife – in the Thames and its estuary.

Not only the seafaring population were piratically inclined; given the opportunity, most men were willing to assist pirates and traffic with them. There were two main ways in which pirates could dispose of their booty; they could either sell it abroad (usually to the Jews or Moors of North Africa who then resold it to christian merchants), or they could bring it back to Britain and dispose of it direct – and practically everyone was interested in trading with them, including admiralty men and other officials who were supposed to clamp down on such illegal trade. The areas which gave most encouragement to pirates were the south-west of England and southern Ireland, where the activities of 'land pirates' caused the government of the day considerable concern.

The period covered by this book is short – less than forty years – but during this time piracy achieved a surprising degree of prominence, and there were developments which are of great significance in the history of piracy. Pirates, like moths, often enjoyed short and colourful lives and by 1640 the vigour of English piracy was temporarily exhausted. Yet during the previous forty years English pirates had attained a position of unprecedented strength and left a legacy which was inherited by the buccaneers of the West Indies and by the corsairs of Barbary.

Little was written about the exploits of these men at the time – no more than a few plays and pamphlets and several songs. In a way this is a tribute to their success, since only the most foolish or arrogant of criminals seeks or desires any kind of publicity.

Of the thousands of English pirates active during these years, the names of perhaps no more than five are known today, and then only to specialised naval historians or to students of piracy. There was no Exquemelin to write a history of the pirates of the early seventeenth century; no Daniel Defoe to visit them in prison to record and popularise their misdeeds.

The only way to gain a full picture of piracy for this period has been to use contemporary manuscript sources, and in particular the records of the High Court of Admiralty, in whose pages the testimonies and fates of many of the pirates are still preserved. By the study of these and other sources it has been possible to build up a vivid account of English piracy as it existed in the first forty years of the seventeenth century, to trace significant changes and developments, to assess its importance, to advance reasons for its decline, and to try to place it in some relationship to the periods of piracy which preceded and succeeded it. Fortunately, the court records contain an abundance of colourful detail which also sheds much light on the private lives of many of these early English adventurers.

3

The Confederation of Deep-Sea Pirates

Though Out-laws, we keep laws amongst our selves,
else we could have no certain government.
– Purser the pirate, *Fortune by Land and Sea*, Act IV Sc 1

The long drawn-out Elizabethan war with Spain marked England's coming of age as a great maritime nation. Nowhere was this more evident than in the Atlantic, where the great struggle between the two countries was mainly fought out. The type of shipping that was to be found in the ocean in the late sixteenth century was considerable both in number and variety. There were rich Brazilmen making for port with cargoes of Campeachy wood and hides, vessels coming from Madeira, the Azores and the Canaries laden with sugar, succates and wines, and, richest of all (but least obtainable), the treasure ships: strong galleons bringing silver from the mines of the New World and fabulous spices from the Far East which had been transhipped from the Pacific. In addition to these exotic ships there were the numerous coasting vessels of European trade: Spanish and Portuguese barques sailing north with the produce of the Iberian peninsula, or northern interlopers sailing south to supply the hard-pressed Spaniards with much-needed commodities such as fish and grain.

It was the promise of such prizes that prompted English privateers to range the ocean in search of plunder. It has been estimated that during any one of the war years (1585–1603) there were never less than a hundred sail of English picaroons on the Spanish coast. The end result of this concentration of activity was that when peace finally came in 1604 there was a new generation of English seamen, hardened by almost two decades of war, who had first-hand experience of the Atlantic.

The war also helped to familiarise English seamen with new bases. Privateers who exceeded their commissions had to find ports of call where their 'prize goods' could be quietly disposed of without any reference to the legality of their capture. In the south the Turkish and Moorish ports of North Africa were ideal for this purpose, while closer to home the wild, indented coast-line of Ireland provided ample opportunity for disposing of goods which might have caused embarrassment in England. Ireland had long been a haven for rovers whose land-based connections had posed problems for Tudor governments. The use of North African ports was comparatively recent, but during the latter stages of the war the 'Barbary connection' became so common for the disposal of booty that the situation was effectively beyond all government control.

It was therefore only natural that when the war ended the pirates of James's reign should have turned to bases in Ireland and Morocco from which to launch their attacks on Atlantic shipping. However, in practice their operations soon assumed a very different character from those of the Elizabethan rovers. In the first place the pirates, ensconced in their remote havens, were completely beyond the arm of governments, a law unto themselves. Their independence was underlined by their strength and organisation. Although relations within the pirate fleet were not always harmonious, bands of a thousand or more men and ten or more ships were not uncommon. Under a succession of able leaders they ranged the length and breadth of the ocean, from the European littoral to Newfoundland and from the west coast of Africa to Iceland. They took prizes wherever and when-ever the opportunity arose, not confining their depredations to the coasts, but attacking ships on the high seas hundreds of miles from land.

Although they were mainly English, many pirate crews had a cosmopolitan character and included Dutchmen, Frenchmen, Moors and even negroes amongst their number. It was probably the first time that out-and-out pirates had enjoyed such strength, independence and unity of action – certainly in the waters of north-west Europe. In many ways the changed character of Jacobean piracy can be said to mark the transitional stage be-

tween the commercial, coastal piracy of sixteenth-century Eng-
land and the rise of the buccaneers in the West Indies in the
latter half of the seventeenth century.

After the war the English pirates soon established themselves
at Mamora, a port on the Atlantic coast of Morocco at the
mouth of the West Sebou River, not far from the infamous
Moorish pirate city of Sallee. A southern base of operations was
of obvious importance if the pirates were to operate off the
Spanish coast, close to the main routes of trans-oceanic trade.
Occasionally they made use of other towns on the coast, such
as Safi, Santa Cruz and Mogador, but these were no more than
open roadsteads offering no security for their ships, while the
other ports on the Moroccan coast were all firmly under the
control of either the Spanish or the Moors.

The King of Morocco was not unduly disturbed by the
presence of a pirate enclave in his dominions. After all, the
pirates provided a continual source of irritation for Spain,
Morocco's traditional enemy. The pirates' depredations also
gave other nations cause for concern, but the King was not pre-
pared to take up arms to drive them out. Indeed, on one occa-
sion when some Dutch men-of-war chased an English pirate
ship into Safi, Mouley Zidan, the King of Morocco, arrested the
Dutch seamen who had dared to pursue the pirates on land and
imprisoned the Dutch agent in Morocco by way of retaliation.
The tolerant and even hospitable way in which the Moors
treated the pirates is hardly surprising, for piracy brought
wealth to a poor, remote country as well as providing a source
of ordnance and much-needed foodstuffs. The Moors sometimes
used the pirates' ships as transport for their troops and the
English would have taught them something of their skills in
sailing and gunnery, just as they did the Turks of North Africa.

Traders and merchants of all descriptions flocked to Mamora
to buy or barter for the booty which the pirates had brought in.
Besides Moors and Jews, there were Dutch, English, French,
Italians and even Spaniards all eager to do business. They
brought goods which the pirates might have found hard to come
by in the normal course of pillage, and left laden with sugar,
wines, wood, spices, indigo, cochineal and any other cargoes

Wardes first Fight

going foorth from *Plimouth* in a man of *Warre*, & of his *practises* & proceedings in the Streights, and of his comming to *Argier*.


Chapter 1.

THis *Ward*, as base in Birth as bad in condition, in the last yeare of her late Maiesties raigne, gaue the first onset to his wicked intendments: his parentage was but meane, his estate lowe, and his hope lesse. His profession was a fisherman of Feuersham in Kent, though his pride at last would be confinde to no limits, nor any thing would serue him but the wide Ocean to walke in. In this wicked resolution, he set foorth from Feuersham in a small Catch towards Plimouth.

He stayed not long there, but he betooke himselfe to

the

Description of Ward's beginnings: 'his parentage was but meane, his estate lowe, and his hope lesse'

(*above*) London's Thames in the early 17th century, showing the swarms of light craft plying above the narrow arches of London Bridge . . .

(*below*) . . . and the dense merchant shipping in the Pool of London, offering rich – and easy – pickings to the most casual plunderer
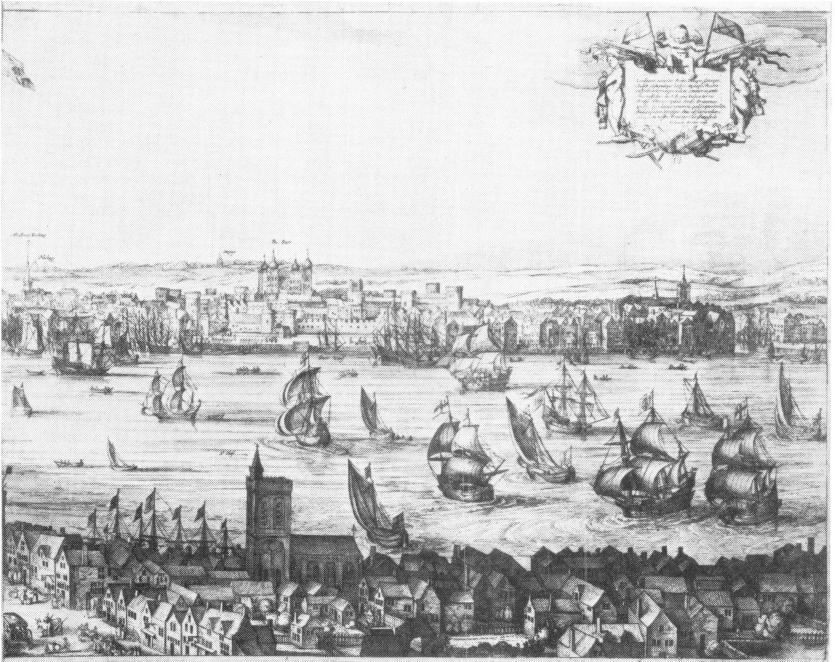
which had chanced to fall into the pirates' hands. Guns, powder, victuals, beer, wine, aqua vitae, tobacco, pipes, playing cards, dice, opium, trinkets, all manner of clothes from fancy hats and doublets to hose and shoes; these and other necessities and trifles were the stock-in-trade which the greedy merchants used to separate the pirates from their loot. One Englishman named Powell actually persuaded his 'customers' to let him have one of their prizes, the *Angola Man*, a great ship, which he used 'as his storehouse or shop for sale of his said apparell and goodes.'[1]

Some Italian ports in particular carried on a thriving trade in contraband. The Florentines had a regular route for the disposal of goods shipped from Mamora, which were landed at Leghorn, carried overland to the Atlantic ports of Goro and Ancona and then reshipped to the Levant. English traders seem to have played a prominent part in this illegal traffic. For instance, James Duppa, an English resident at Leghorn, is known to have sent several ships to Mamora to trade with the pirates; but then his brother Michael was one of the leading pirate captains there.

Excellent as it was as a base for the disposal of their booty, Mamora could not fulfil all the pirates' needs. Beef, mutton, beer, timber, pitch, sailcloth, powder and other supplies could best be obtained in northern Europe. Also, if the pirates were to cruise the length and breadth of the North Atlantic they desperately needed a northern base to complement Mamora. But there was an even more pressing need for an alternative base of operations. Each year as the weather became warmer and the seas around the Straits of Gibraltar grew calmer, galleys and other peace-keeping forces began to put to sea in sufficient numbers to hinder the pirates' activities and increase the risk of capture. Thus, in the spring or early summer the prudent pirate captain set his course northward, usually for Ireland, 'that Nursery and Storehouse of Pirates'.[2]

Ireland had a long history of flirtation with piracy going back to the sixteenth century and probably earlier. Her south-west coastline was a veritable pirates' paradise, hundreds of miles of hidden harbours, remote bays, small islands, deep-water anchorages and protective headlands and capes. Also, the south-west

D

or Munster coast was the first landfall for ocean-going shipping approaching the British Isles. For the pirate, Munster had the additional attraction of being a remote and unruly province which sometimes, to the frustration of the English Lords of the Privy Council, seemed to be beyond the control of either London or Dublin. In 1616, Lord Falkland, the Lord Deputy of Ireland, described some of the advantages which Ireland afforded pirates and went on to suggest that the pirates should be pardoned and set to work on the coast in the interests of the crown,

> . . . being here much more cheaply victualled, much more easily out and in, at and from sea, which lies opener with less impediments of tides and channels, and lands ends and capes to double, which require varieties of wind to serve them together with the singular and secure harbours for ships of all burthens to ride in all weathers.

Yet another factor encouraged pirates to resort to Ireland. Because of a loophole in the law, pirates who were captured there could escape scot-free by pleading 'benefit of clergy'. This was a farce whereby a patently guilty but literate pirate could not be tried in a secular court. The only way round the problem was to send the prisoner to England for trial, but keeping a man in gaol and arranging for him to be escorted over to England was a tedious and costly business and usually all but the most hardened offenders were freed (on at least one occasion it was the hardened offenders who were released by mistake). This anomalous situation continued to plague the Lord Deputy of Ireland throughout the early years of the century, and was only ended when Irish law was finally brought into line with that of England in 1613.

The main centre of pirate activity was the extreme south-west of Munster between Cape Clear and Mizen Head, where the sea breaks up through 'Carbery's Hundred Isles' making what is suggestively called Roaringwater Bay. Baltimore, Long Island and Sherkin Island were all places in the bay much frequented by the pirates, but their main stronghold was Leamcon. All that bears the name today is a solitary house and a watch-tower, but

in the seventeenth century Leamcon was the name given to a whole peninsula joined to the mainland by a narrow causeway. Its western tip, known as Castle Point, is still guarded by the ruins of a castle which is itself cut off from the peninsula by a chasm which probably gave rise to the name Leamcon, meaning Dog's Leap in Gaelic. The peninsula is guarded by steep cliffs rising more than a hundred feet out of the sea in places, but in the east the land falls towards a spot, still known as Gun Point, where the pirates are thought to have constructed some makeshift fortification. Leamcon harbour itself, on the north-west side of the peninsula, guarded by a small island and a maze of sunken rocks, is reputed to be 'one of the dirtiest bottoms known', which no doubt made it even more secure from attack from the sea.

Not that the pirates had much need for protection. Almost all the population around Roaringwater Bay was hand in glove with them. By rights the economy of the Munster coast should have been no more than an indolent agricultural and fishing community could support, but, as one English agent reported: 'That which passeth here is rialls of eight, Barbary ducats, and dollars, and it is thought some treasure is buried on land by these pirates.'[3] Strange indeed that while they claimed to be dominated by a band of ruthless cut-throats, the ships of the local inhabitants were rarely interfered with, their houses were never razed to the ground and the people went unmolested.

Of course the locals' best defence against charges of aiding and abetting was to claim that the pirates had appeared in such strength that they had had no alternative but to entertain them and supply their wants. Pirates were certainly the best of customers, usually rich, often generous and prepared to pay inflated prices for their supplies. Trade could be carried on clandestinely, by leaving goods on shore at a prearranged place to be collected under cover of night. However, in the unlikely event of discovery such underhand measures were bound to be incriminatory. It was far more popular for the pirates to pretend to carry off their provisions by force:

... for those that are the theifs and most able relievers of them suffer their goods to be taken forcibly, for which they receive payment to the double valewe, and by that meanes thinke to be freed from the penalty of divers proclamacions forbidding comerce with them ...[4]

The pirates resorted to the coast so often and with such regularity that supplying their needs soon assumed the proportions of a well-run industry. Although the province itself depended on outside supplies of foodstuffs such as beer, bread, cheese and butter, the population could provide the pirates with these in plenty. Dubious establishments (known as alehouses) sprang up on remote parts of the coast, and it was reported that pirates,

> ... may be enterteyned and kept in those alehouses three moneths or more without payment for anything they take, every pyrate having his factor there for whom hee provideth men and other necessaries against their arrivall, and then receiveth payment largely for his paynes, soe that it is a perpetuall markett for that trafficque.[5]

Yet there was no real need for secrecy. The local towns and villages were unwilling to miss their share of the proceeds from pirate booty. Most of the population of Baltimore was living off contraband. Thomas Crook, a Justice of the Peace and chief officer of the port, victualled pirate ships, entertained their crews in his house and, in partnership with a man named Sammon, had a monopoly of buying cloth from the pirates who came into harbour. It is scarcely surprising that the rest of the inhabitants of Baltimore felt free to trade openly with pirates. In 1607 almost everyone in the town was engaged in barter with Captain Richard Robinson and his crew, who brought in a prize laden with indigo, cochineal and ginger and then proceeded to dissipate their profits 'in most riotous manner'.[6] Massalin, a local butcher, once slaughtered 200 cows in Crook's backyard to feed the pirate crews. No doubt most of the townsfolk managed to get their hands on at least some of the pirates' booty, for 'generallie the inhabitants theeraboute doe give them entertainement in theire houses, which is donne ... by the moste parte for

gaine, they takeinge excessivelie of them for such victualles as they sell them.'[7]

If the pirates could freely visit Baltimore (which was, after all, a sizeable town and the base of the solitary English naval pinnace which patrolled the Irish coast in summer), it can be imagined how little the rule of law prevailed in the remoter settlements of the province. Just across Roaringwater Bay, at Leamcon, pirate rule was absolute. There even Mr Way, the local vicar, had been openly observed to 'victualle and entertaine all manner of pirates'.[8] To the north, in Bantry Bay, Whiddy Island was another notorious victualling point, the two most infamous offenders being John Stiles, who ran a thriving business providing for the pirates' needs, and Mr Davenent, another islander who is known to have victualled the pirate ships of Bishop, Easton and Coward with 'beeves and muttes'.[9]

Yet victuals and other provisions were only one part of a pirate captain's needs. He also had to trim, modify or even careen his vessel and the Munster coast was ideal for this. The pirates were also usually in need of crew members and these were readily available from the 'Guest houses upon the Shore, which are commonly full of Idle Men',[10] or else there were others ready to serve who came from England for the express purpose of joining up.

The coastal population soon adapted its amenities to meet the pirates' more personal requirements. Mainwaring in his *Discourse of Pirates* noted that 'they have also good store of English, Scottish and Irish wenches which resort unto them, and these are strong attractors to draw the common sort of them thither.'[11] Prostitution was evidently almost as attractive a prospect as buccaneering. One night, a man called Gibbs loaded his Devonshire bark with booty and sailed away, and 'carryed with him two of the pyratts and some of their whores, aboute fyve in number.'[12]

Notoriety bred success in Munster. The coast soon became the catchment area for all the worst elements in society. Men brought provisions to the pirates from other parts of Ireland, under cover of carrying them to the fishermen at Crookhaven. For example, Henry Cook of Cork delivered twenty-two barrels

of beer for Captain Wolmer's ship at Leamcon. However, the main suppliers came from the west of England. Many English-men came to deal with the pirates under the guise of fishing, trading or even 'under the colour of planting'.[13] Some settled permanently in Ireland in order to continue their illicit trade with greater ease. Others came simply to join a pirate crew and cash in on the new-found prosperity. These dealings of the English, whatever their nature, were always well disguised, for once again it was made to appear as if the pirates were in com-plete control of events, 'both to keep the men from impunitye whoe seeme to be forced to that course of life, and themselves likewise whoe complayne of the losse of their voyage when they have best made it.'[14]

The problem of how to prevent the population from collabor-ating with the pirates was almost insoluble. In 1609 the vice-president of Munster, Sir Richard Moryson, set out the difficulties facing the government fairly succinctly: 'The con-tinual repair of the pirates to the western coast of this province, in consequence of the remoteness of the place, the wildness of the people, and their own strength and wealth both to command and entice relief, is very difficult . . . to prevent or remedy.'[15] Three years later the trade in contraband was still booming and the problems of prevention were just as great. In his frustration, Lord Deputy Chichester exclaimed, 'This pest is grown so strong and so general as we are no more able to struggle with it.'[16]

Out at sea the pirates followed systematic patterns of search. If they had just cruised the ocean in an indiscriminate fashion their chances of taking prizes would have been greatly reduced. Of course they could not allow their operations to become too predictable: that would have frightened off their prey and made themselves an easier target for peace-keeping forces. Usually, the risks involved in selecting locations were commensurate with the chances for plunder. For example, the seas in the vicinity of the Straits of Gibraltar were a bottleneck for merchant vessels and were consequently better patrolled. This was especially true during the summer months as Captain Peter Boniton dis-covered to his cost. Boniton, a Cornishman, described as 'one of

the Ireland Pirates, whose purpose was to goe unto the Straits to learn newes', was engaged off Faro in 1609 by a French galleon which had a commission to take pirates. Despite conducting a gallant defence, he was forced to surrender his ship and was taken to Marseilles and executed.

Boniton's mission, 'to learn newes', is curious. Scarcely any evidence exists to show where pirates got their intelligence of ships' movements. They obviously kept their eyes and ears open in port and new recruits may have brought valuable information with them. Furthermore, it was common practice for passing ships to hail one another and to inquire about the position of other vessels in the vicinity. Prisoners from captured vessels may also have volunteered information; if they did not, the pirates were quite ready to resort to torture. No doubt the pirates had sources of intelligence amongst their friends and associates on land, but more often than not the sighting of a fine prize probably owed more to luck and inspired guesswork than to planning.

Pirates had no desire to expend unnecessary energy on chasing their prey. Rather they preferred to lie in wait and conceal their true identity until a prize fell into their hands. Every captain worth his salt concentrated his search on the most likely areas. Pirate ships often took up a predatory position off a headland in the hope of intercepting merchantmen who were forced to double the cape. Cape St Vincent, Cape Finisterre, Ushant and Cape Clear were all favourite hunting grounds. The western approach to the Channel was another favourite haunt, since all shipping bound for England, Holland, Scandinavia or the Hanseatic ports had to converge on the area. Another likely region for plunder was out in the ocean close to the various islands. Apart from their own trade with mainland Europe, the Canaries, Madeira and the Azores were used as landmarks or staging-posts by Spanish ships returning from the New World and many captures were made nearby.

There was, therefore, considerable choice open to a pirate captain in his pursuit of prizes. While his operations always remained flexible, it can be seen that the most experienced commanders operated within a broad framework of commonsense

rules. Beyond this, the captain's decision on where to try his luck depended on many factors: the state of his crew, the forces at his disposal, the time of year, the weather, the direction of the wind, and perhaps most important of all, his own personal intuition.

The ships which fell prey to pirates in the ocean might be anything from small coasters or fishing vessels, worth only a few hundred pounds, to Spanish Brazilmen with cargoes of sugar, wood, hides and tobacco worth several thousand pounds. East Indiamen and galleons of the Spanish bullion fleet were never captured by the pirates, but this was no disgrace, since they were well-nigh impregnable. Even so, the presence of the pirates was taken as a threat to even the strongest ships. For example, in 1608, when the ship heralding the approach of the Spanish West Indies *Flota* was captured, a special armada was sent out from Spain to convoy the vessels safely home.

The Spanish, both historically and geographically, were destined to suffer heavily at the hands of the English pirates. In 1606 their ambassador in England complained of the spoils which the English made on shipping returning from Brazil and elsewhere. Losses continued to mount. In successive months in 1610 two Brazilmen were captured by Captain Christopher Webb who was operating from Mamora in his ship *Blue Man of War*. Two years later the pirates were as active as ever and Sir John Digby wrote from Madrid that 'Wee are heere much troubled with ye complaints that are lately come against our Englishe pyratts.'[17] To the Spanish it must sometimes have seemed as though the war had never ended. Indeed, in 1612 the Spanish ambassador was driven to tell James that the English pirates had 'done more damage since the conclusion of the peace than before in time of war'.[18]

French shipping was also particularly vulnerable. A petition to King James from a French merchant, dated 9 January 1608, lists French losses during the previous eighteen months. In that time no less than fifteen ships and two barks were lost, the ports suffering most being St Gilles and Olonne. Two of the prizes were particularly rich. The *St Anne* of St Gilles, captured off Cape St Vincent, was carrying gold and silver which the French valued at 36,000 livres (£3,600), and the *Hunter* of Le Havre,

taken in the roadstead at Safi with her cargo of cotton and barley, was said to be worth as much as 50,000 livres (£5,000). Certainly there can be no doubt that in 1606 and 1607 the French were sustaining heavy losses. In English records covering the same eighteen months as the French petition, indictments were framed for piracies on thirteen French vessels whose total value is given as nearly £19,000. Thus, even at a conservative average, it can be said that a French ship worth above £1,000 was captured by English pirates every month. For the equivalent in modern money this figure should be multiplied at least twenty times.

Further detailed information concerning French losses comes in a document preserved in the State Papers, France, entitled 'A Remonstrance to their Lordships of the English Piracyes in 1610 and in 1611 against ye marchants of Rochelle only.' In these two years, seventeen vessels are listed as having been plundered and total losses are estimated at 362,000 francs (£36,200). Although the document only purports to describe losses sustained by merchants of La Rochelle, it probably includes the *total* losses of ships in which the merchants of the town had an interest, however small. Only seven of the spoiled vessels were from La Rochelle itself, most of the others coming from nearby places on the French coast such as the Ile de Ré and, once again, Olonne. The greatest disruption seems to have been caused in trade with the Iberian peninsula, but ships trading with Barbary, Italy and the Canary Islands were also affected. The lost cargoes included sugar, wine, cochineal, campeachy wood and money. Captain Thomas Francke emerges from this document as the scourge of the French, being credited with five prizes, but William Baughe, Gilbert Roope and Thomas Hussey are all mentioned as having made captures.

From these examples it can be seen that existing evidence of the damage caused by English pirates is extremely sketchy. Such as there is is usually concerned with losses suffered by one particular country over a short period of time. Still, if anything, the evidence can be said to underplay the impact of piracy on Atlantic commerce. Many captures were simply never reported – and more sinisterly, some never could be. Dead men tell no

tales, nor do they give testimony in a court of law. In 1607, after an English pirate had taken a French prize on the Galician coast, it was reported that:

> . . . ther is many of these Roges abrode, and yf they meet with an englishman they cast them all over borde because ther shalbe noe more Speches afterward. And soe the report in England is that such Shipps are cast away; when these damned villains goe for barbery and ther make sale of ther praye.[19]

Even if merchants could discover the true fate of their vessels there was little remedy in formal protests or legal action. Law suits in England tended to be costly and protracted, and after the offenders had been identified and apprehended it was all but impossible to force them to disgorge their ill-gotten gains.

The scope and daring of the pirates' operations is perhaps more spectacular than the actual damage which they caused. Nowhere was shipping safe from attack. During the second decade of the century large bands of English pirates crossed the Atlantic in search of prey. Their main objective was the fishing boats which were attracted to the Newfoundland Banks in their hundreds every year. Of course, the seizure of boatloads of fish was not in itself a particularly attractive prospect for any self-respecting pirate. Fish could be used to supplement a dreary diet, but it only assumed any commercial value when it reached the markets in Europe. It was the boats and the fishermen themselves that mainly interested the pirates: the boats because they offered a plentiful supply of arms, powder, furniture, tackle, victuals and drink, and the men and boys who manned them because they made excellent conscripts to a pirate crew.

The first notable incursion by English pirates occurred in 1612. In that year Peter Easton, 'the arch-pirate', arrived on the American coast with a strong squadron of ships. Entering Chesapeake Bay, he captured three Spanish fishing boats whose crews fled ashore at his approach. He then built a 'fort' at Havre de Grace under which he was able to repair his ships and convert his prizes for more warlike tasks than fishing. Before long he was cruising in Newfoundland waters in command of nine ships, striking terror into fishermen of all nationalities. During the

summer of 1612 he plundered almost at will and increased his forces by commandeering some 500 British fishermen. One contemporary account put the damage caused by Easton and his captains at £20,400, which in modern terms might be in the region of £500,000.

The pirates were on the Banks again two years later. On 4 June 1614 eight pirate ships arrived under the command of Henry Mainwaring, another notorious leader. They stayed for just over three months, finally departing on 14 September, but in that short space of time they were able to furnish all their needs and greatly to strengthen their forces. Mainwaring was particularly severe with foreign fishermen, sometimes leaving them with nothing to keep themselves alive on the return voyage save a little bread and their own wits. Like Easton, he also forced or cajoled many British fishermen into joining him, and when he finally quit Newfoundland he was reported to have taken about 400 members of the fishing force with him!

No doubt Newfoundland was a popular resort for pirates because they could always count on finding large numbers of poorly-defended ships. It was not until the end of James's reign that any effective protection was provided for the British Newfoundland fishery. In the meantime pirates continued to appear year after year, although perhaps not in such great strength as they had under Easton and Mainwaring. There is little evidence to show that their depredations extended far to the south. During the first part of the century the West Indies does not appear to have been much frequented by English rovers. Possibly Caribbean waters did not present such easy pickings as those of Newfoundland.

Occasionally pirates are to be found in the most unlikely latitudes. In 1614 William Clark and James Gentleman raided the Westmann Isles in Iceland as revenge for the way in which the islanders had treated some of Gentleman's men who had gone ashore there in the previous year. For two whole weeks the pirates ran riot, raping, pillaging, plundering the King of Denmark's storehouses and desecrating churches. The incident is not without significance. Clark, who had once served as a bosun's mate in the English Channel squadron, eventually

found his way to Algiers where he is known to have served in Algerine corsairs. It cannot be entirely a coincidence that only a few years after his raid on the Westmann Isles, Iceland should have been visited by an Algerine raiding party.

Pirates also occasionally strayed into Scottish waters. In 1610 captains William Randal and John Perkins were captured in the Orkneys after a fierce battle with three Scottish ships which had been sent out from Leith in pursuit of them. Before their downfall these pirates had wrought havoc in the Atlantic and the North Sea, having taken prizes as far apart as the Azores and the Norwegian coast.

Such intrusions were, however, exceptional. Pirates were rarely to be encountered in Scottish and Icelandic waters. Apart from facing rough weather and little-known coasts, the pirate captain who ventured too far north was cutting himself off from the main lanes of European commerce and it became impossible for him to return to the principal hunting-grounds off the Spanish coast without making a landfall in Ireland to attend to his ship and refresh his men.

Pirates were also to be found marauding in southern waters. For example, during the winter of 1611–12 Peter Easton was lying off the coast of West Africa near Cape Blanc. He succeeded in intercepting several ships rounding the cape, his most important capture being the *Jacob* of Amsterdam which was returning from a Guinea voyage laden with a rich cargo of hides and ivory. After removing some ordnance from a Portuguese fort at the cape, he then cruised south along the coast to Cape Verde capturing three English merchantmen on the way.

These far-flung voyages were not always crowned with success. They were particularly hazardous, especially for a pirate ship, because the complement of men was larger than it would have been on a peaceful vessel of similar size. Overcrowding increased the risk of disease and if no prizes came their way, or if they were becalmed, the pirates could soon die of hunger or thirst. The turns of fate which an adventurous pirate crew might be subject to are apparent in the voyages of Tibalt Saxbridge and his followers in 1608–9.

Saxbridge was a 'little fellowe' but an imaginative leader. In

September 1608 he was lurking off Ushant in command of two ships when he chanced to encounter the *Brave* of Dieppe, which was returning home from a voyage to Senegal. Saxbridge and his men quickly overcame any resistance and brought their rich prize with her cargo of hides, ivory and gum to Ireland. Their presence off the Munster coast caused alarm in government circles because they were reported to be strong enough to land 300 men. However, after disposing of their loot and recruiting some new crew members the pirates put to sea again and sailed to Mogador in Morocco. After refreshing themselves they set a course westwards and eventually reached the West Indies, where they lost eight men in an attempt to send a landing party ashore. Hungry and ill (some of the crew had been suffering from scurvy at the Azores), the pirates sailed to Newfoundland, where they found a French ship lying at anchor. Saxbridge manned three shallops and attempted to take the ship under cover of night, but the Frenchmen drove the pirates off and Saxbridge was killed.

The pirate ship had lost her main and top masts, and was so leaky that the only hope for the survivors of her crew was to seek passage home in an English ship. In spite of the hardships they had endured some of the men were still not disillusioned with piracy. One group got passage home in a ship which called at Conquet in Brittany, where seizing the chance to resume their old profession, the 'passengers', under the leadership of Philip Harvey, boarded the *Son* of Flushing and sailed off in her. They got as far as the Cape Verde Islands but once again they failed to take any prizes and only 'grew in miserie'. Eventually they managed to make a landfall in Ireland and surrender on the best terms they could obtain.[20]

Harvey and his men must have made a pathetic sight. To all appearances they were just poor, ragged seamen who, like so many others, had resorted to piracy in a desperate effort to keep themselves alive. Such weak bands of would-be robbers presented no problem to local admiralty officers. If caught they would hang, for they generally had no money to buy their lives and their skill as seamen was probably minimal. They were the casualties of an unjust age and of a particularly harsh course of

life, and their bodies were strung up from gallows on prominent headlands all round the coast as an example to others.

The task of chasing a few 'petty pirates' provided good sport for naval captains who were assigned to tedious patrols in home waters. It was, however, a very different story with the deep-sea pirates who emerged in James's reign. They were as desperate as their less fortunate brethren but they were also resourceful, ambitious and ruthless. They frequently appeared in unassailable strength, intimidated naval vessels, walked openly in sea ports, poured scorn on the King of England and sometimes even set themselves up as kings.

Atlantic piracy reached its peak between about 1608 and 1614 under a succession of able leaders. Several pirate captains of note had come to the fore after the peace with Spain of 1604, but the first man to obtain general recognition throughout the whole pirate fleet was the man whom the pirates elected 'admiral', Richard Bishop. He had probably been the wartime captain of a privateer, the *Black Bishop* of Yarmouth, which had put to sea in 1591. This is more likely since he is mentioned in some sources as a Yarmouth man. Born in about 1561, he must have been just over forty years old when the war ended. Unable to adjust to peacetime conditions he continued as a privateer, taking Dutch letters of marque (Holland continued the struggle with Spain long after England had made peace). In 1605 he and his men encountered the pirate John Ward on the Moroccan coast and the two crews joined forces. Bishop sailed with Ward to Tunis where he spent some years, evidently with little reward, for in 1608 it was reported that 'Captaine Bisshopp liveth in Tunis in poore estate.'[21]

While he was at Tunis Bishop seems to have suffered a crisis of conscience. He was not so callous as Ward and the other renegades. He still saw Spain as the natural enemy and he wanted no part of plundering English shipping and enslaving his own countrymen. In 1608 he left Tunis with a crew of sixty Englishmen, never to return. Perhaps a personal disagreement with Ward had hastened his departure.

Bishop's arrival in the Atlantic in 1608 coincided with an upsurge in piratical activity. He was soon working in consortship

with other successful pirate captains: John Jennings, an inveterate pirate who had been marauding under Dutch letters of marque ever since England had made peace; James Harris, a ship's master who had been redeemed from slavery in Tunis by Bishop for a sum of 2,500 crowns; Tibalt Saxbridge, whose exploits have already been mentioned; Peter Easton, who was to become an even more notorious leader than Bishop himself; Gilbert Roope; Robert Stephenson; Thomas Francke and many others. But of all these leaders Bishop was outstanding, possibly because he had qualities which were rare in a pirate. Something of his ability may be gained from a letter which the lord deputy of Ireland, Sir Arthur Chichester, wrote to the Earl of Nottingham in 1610, when Bishop was seeking a royal pardon:

> I have often heard it reported of Bishop; that he is by farr the most sufficient man amongest them all; both for Cowncell and Commaund, as he was alwayes well accompted of, by Sir John Norris, under whom he served in the warres of those tymes; I heare withall that he is a man of good temper and moderation, (for one of that Corse of liefe), and a keeper of his woord.[22]

In only a short time Bishop seems to have moulded the pirates into a loose confederation and to have given them a cohesion and purpose that had been absent before his arrival on the scene. In the summer of 1609 he was reported to be at Leamcon with eleven ships and a thousand men. Richard Kerry, one of the officers of the vice-admiralty of Munster, travelled to Leamcon to spy on the pirates and reported that he had seen 9 ships in harbour, 2 of over 200 tons, mounting at least 100 guns between them, Bishop's ship, a 240-tonner, was carrying 27 guns. His 'vice admiral' Peter Easton was in a French ship mounting 35 pieces of ordnance, and the 'rear admiral', Thomas Francke, had a 200-ton flyboat which carried 16 pieces.

The small pinnaces which the government detailed to patrol the coasts were completely at the mercy of the pirates. In 1608 the unenviable task of freeing the coast from pirates fell to Captain Williamson and the *Tremontane*. In the normal course of events the *Tremontane* was outsailed by any pirate ship that

it sighted. In August, however, Williamson actually managed to surprise the pirate vessel of Captain Saxbridge which was lying at Baltimore. The naval patrol ship immediately opened fire but was soon forced to withdraw, because:

> Captaine Jeninges and Captaine Bishoppe with theire shippes came downe to the saied Williamson, and anchored the one of his bowe and the other on his quarter within pistoll shott, and the said Williamson beeinge then as it seemed not fitt to fighte with them putt forthe a flagg of Truce . . .[23]

It is not surprising to hear that Williamson and his men made merry with the pirates and received gifts from many of them for neglecting to attempt to do their duty while they were stationed on the Irish coast. Really they were in no position to do otherwise.

Bishop's leadership of the pirates did not last long. Already in 1610 he was tiring of piracy and had agreed to sign a petition, framed by some injured merchants, craving a pardon for himself and his followers. His penitent attitude (he is reported to have said 'I would rather die a poor labourer in mine own country rather than be the richest pirate in the world'), together with the representations which were made on his behalf by the lord deputy of Ireland and by foreign ambassadors, who hoped that their subjects might recover some of their losses if he were pardoned, all persuaded King James to show mercy. Bishop finally gave himself up in Ireland in 1611 and was granted a protection by the lord deputy. He apparently settled in or near Schull where he built a house 'after the English fation'. Yet he does not seem to have completely forsaken his old ways. In 1617, when he must have been nearly 60, a wanted pirate captain was reported to have been arrested 'in the house of one Captain Bishopp, an old pardoned pirate, that lives suspiciously near Limcon and Scull Haven, ever plotting with and relieving of pirates.'[24]

If the government thought that Bishop's acceptance of the pardon would lead to a decline in piracy they were sadly mistaken. In 1611 the pirates appeared in greater strength than ever before under their new leader, Peter Easton. He was at Leamcon

in July with nine men-of-war and four prizes, and by the end of the summer he had as many as 17 ships under his command. Salisbury received news of the seriousness of the situation through Sir Ferdinando Gorges, keeper of Plymouth Fort, who wrote on 5 July that the pirates' strength was estimated at 2,000 men (all English) and 40 ships, and warning that:

These men thus furnished threaten the world and gives yt out they expect to be Called in verie shortlie by his Majestie's pardon for 40,000 pownds, of whome not withstanding, they speake verie aprobriouslie, but withall they say yf they bee not, they will take and spoyle all they meete with.[25]

Worse still, Easton was inclined to be less sympathetic to his own countrymen than Bishop had been. After the *Gift of God* had been rifled and her crew badly mistreated, her master appeared in the admiralty court to pass on Easton's warning:

... to tell the merchants on the exchange that he would be a scourge to Englishemen, sayeng he had no Englishe blood in his belly and therefore esteemed Englishe men no other then as Turckes and Jewes.[26]

Easton was well qualified to succeed Bishop, and indeed had been mentioned as his 'vice-admiral'. A Dartmouth man, he had served his apprenticeship in privateers and pirate vessels and had considerable knowledge of gunnery. He is first heard of in 1607, serving first in a Dutch privateer and then in Captain Richard Robinson's pirate ship. He left Robinson after a quarrel early in 1608 and from then until he received a pardon from the Duke of Savoy in 1613 his career was one of uninterrupted success. William Parkhurst, the English agent in Savoy, met Easton in 1613, and left this description of him:

... hee seemeth to have the age of 40 yeares: his countenance is rude and savadge ... his speech and carriage is slow, subtile, and guilty...[27]

Under Easton the pirates can be said to have intercepted and plundered shipping almost at will. In the winter of 1610–11 he was lying off Cape Finisterre with the *Fortune*, 160 tons, 22

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guns, and is known to have robbed at least three English ships. He took an important prize in March 1611, the *White Swan* of Rotterdam, which was returning from Tenerife with a cargo which included sixty-two chests of sugar, forty butts of Canary wines, twelve hogsheads of syrup, ten barrels of preserves and four packs of Spanish wool. The *White Swan* was such a fine ship that Easton decided to take her to Ireland and fit her out as his own man-of-war. It was probably in the *White Swan* later that year that Easton made one of his most famous captures. In the summer of 1611 a Dutch squadron of warships was sent out in pursuit of the pirates. Easton, deciding to bring matters to a head, entered the Sleeve with six strong vessels in search of the Dutch. On 28 June, some sixteen leagues south of the Scilly Isles, he encountered two fine merchantmen, the *Concord* of London, 240 tons, and the *Philip Bonaventure* of Dover, both of which he immediately commandeered to strengthen his forces for the impending confrontation with the Dutch. The confrontation never came, and Easton kept his two prizes. Between them the merchantmen were worth £40,000 and the *Concord* was a particularly useful prize, 'being a tall shippe, and verie well fitted with ordinaunce and municion.'[28]

Despite pressure from London merchants who had suffered heavy losses by the capture of the two English ships, the government was powerless to act. The navy was incapable of fitting out a sufficiently strong force quickly enough. At first it had been decided to send the *Rainbow*, 480 tons, 28 guns, and a pinnace, but no action was taken after the lord admiral had written to the Earl of Salisbury dissociating himself from the decision. Nottingham believed that such a small force could only bring dishonour on the navy if it chanced to encounter the pirates, especially since three of Easton's squadron were 'very great shipps, carienge allmost as much ordonnaunce as the Rainebowe.'[29]

If force had to be ruled out, there were still two courses of action open to the government. The Dutch, who had sent men-of-war out in pursuit of the pirates, were seeking permission from James for their ships to patrol British waters, and for that purpose to be granted access to British ports. The other course

of action was to offer the pirates a general pardon in the hope that they would surrender. Neither solution could bring much honour to James. To give the Dutch permission to patrol British waters was tantamount to admitting that the royal navy was incapable of doing the job. To extend a pardon to such desperate men was almost as degrading, for it meant that the King was reduced to bargaining with rogues and thieves. In the event it was decided to do both. Thus, at the same time that James was offering a free pardon to Easton and his men he was conspiring with the Dutch to capture them.

The man who was entrusted to carry the pardon to the pirates was Roger Middleton. He arrived in Ireland on 17 August 1611 – just ten days after the pirates had left. They had known that a pardon was on the way but many of them were restless and feared that the pardon was simply a device to gain time until the navy or the Dutch men-of-war arrived to deal with them. In any case the pirates had the offer of an alternative pardon from the Grand Duke of Tuscany who had promised to welcome them as 'his subjects and servants'.[30]

After they left Ireland the band divided into three squadrons. Easton, taking Hughs and Harvey with him, sailed to West Africa before crossing the Atlantic to prey on the Newfoundland fishermen. The other two groups, comprising Baughe, Arthur and Gay and Francke, Stephenson and Smith, remained in European waters and continued their depredations with great effect.

From Ireland Middleton went to Mamora and eventually persuaded many of the pirates to give themselves up. However, he used his position to mulct them as much as he could, forcing many of them to buy their pardons from him. Worse still, he encouraged several captains to remain at sea to take further prizes before surrendering, because under the terms of the pardon they were allowed to keep all their booty. In November 1612 a petition was presented to the Privy Council 'conteyning sundry informacions of fraudes and notorious abuses supposed to be done by Captaine Roger Middleton, when hee was employed to carry his Majesties pardon to the said Easton and his consorts.'[31]

At least twelve pirate crews are known to have surrendered in response to the general pardon of 1611–12. However, Easton, the main object of the pardon, still remained at large. He returned from Newfoundland late in 1612 and spent some months on the Moroccan coast waiting for news of the pardon before finally making his way to Savoy where he was well received. He entered Villefranche on 20 February 1613 at the head of four ships and 900 men and was reported to have eight more vessels outside the Straits waiting to join him. A conservative inventory put the value of his booty at 100,000 crowns. At first the pirate was treated with suspicion but he soon became a firm favourite with the duke. For his skill in the use of artillery in Savoy's war with Mantua he was awarded an annual pension of £4,000 and the duke even went so far as to bestow the title of marquis on him. The Savoyard court was equally amused at the novelty of having a foreign pirate in their midst and affectionately christened him '*Il Corsaro Inglese*'. He finally set the seal on one of the most successful careers in the history of piracy when he married an heiress and was 'converted' to Catholicism.

Easton's followers were far less fortunate. The men who had helped him amass his fortune were largely ignored and many were soon forced to return to piracy. Thomas Tucker, a Newcastle mariner 'excellent in his art and profession',[32] was one man who deserved better treatment. He had been at sea with the pirates for two long years and had risen to master's mate aboard Easton's own ship. After entering Villefranche he had got employment as a soldier in Savoy, but received only a pittance and after about a year got a passage to Mamora and re-joined a pirate crew. He soon gained his own command and by 1614 was once again marauding in the ocean.

It was a similar story with many pirates who surrendered in England under the terms of the general pardon. Some of the men were sent ashore without getting their fair share of the loot, while others who did well soon squandered what they got. For example, in June 1612 William Baughe and his men surrendered at Kinsale with several prizes and booty worth thousands of pounds, yet within a short time many of the pirates were again at sea looking for new prizes. Perhaps it would be too idealistic

to expect seamen who had tasted success and adventure to mend their ways overnight.

The vigour of English piracy was such that the disappearance of a few leaders was unlikely to stem the tide of lawlessness. There was no shortage of experienced seamen waiting to take over their own command. The strength of the pirates remained as great as ever. In the summer of 1614 there were no less than thirty ships in harbour at Mamora, most of them being of a hundred tons or more, and two of them of 300 tons. It is interesting to note that of fifteen captains mentioned not one appears to have been prominent under Bishop or Easton.

The new 'admiral' of the pirate band was Henry Mainwaring. In many respects he was the most able leader of all. Born in 1587, the grandson of a vice-admiral of Sussex, he graduated from Brasenose College Oxford with the degree of BA in 1602. After a brief attempt to study law at the Inner Temple he appears to have pursued a military career. He may have been at the siege of Juliers in 1610 and in 1611 his name was put forward as captain of St Andrew's Castle. It was possibly frustration at the conventional processes of advancement that made him turn his ambition towards the sea. In July 1612 he paid £450 to the shipwright Phineas Pett for the *Resistance*, his brother Arthur entering into a bond for the payment of the remainder of the purchase price. His idea seems to have been to go on a trading voyage to the West Indies, and he was successful in finding financial backers in London and Dartmouth. In the summer of 1613 he set sail with the *Resistance* and the *Nightingale*, both of them well-armed and victualled. It was not long before his true intentions were revealed, for he 'altered his course and fell to takinge and spoylinge of shipps and goods.' Among his first prizes were the *Golden Lion* of Lübeck, 250 tons, and the *Gift* of Calais, both of which he captured off the Spanish coast in August 1613.

Mainwaring remained at large for more than two years, during which time he firmly stamped his character on English piracy. In particular he was fiercely anti-Spanish. It was later suggested that his plans to trade in the West Indies had been quashed by the intervention of the Spanish ambassador and that

he had turned to piracy as a last resort. If that were true the Spanish certainly had cause to regret intervening in his affairs. Between 1613 and 1615 he and his confederates plagued Spanish shipping and on one celebrated occasion, even got the best of a Spanish naval squadron which tried to capture them. Some years after his retirement from piracy, Mainwaring (as Lieutenant of Dover Castle) was in the incongruous position of having to welcome Gondomar, the Spanish ambassador, to England. Gondomar thanked the ex-pirate for welcoming him and jested that for his courtesy he would forgive him twelve out of the million crowns which he had plundered from Spanish subjects.

In retrospect Mainwaring's adventures as a pirate are a brief interlude in a long and distinguished career. An English pardon was granted to him and his followers in June 1616 and he lived on until 1653. He was knighted in 1618 and wrote several treatises on naval subjects (including a discourse on pirates). Apart from being Lieutenant of Dover Castle, he was also an MP and a naval commissioner, besides holding high command in some of the naval expeditions of James I and Charles I's reigns. The experience he gained while he was a pirate stood him in good stead for the rest of his life. When he left England in 1613 he was only twenty-six years of age and had little or no knowledge of the sea. Yet five years later, after his return to England, the Venetian ambassador was able to write that, 'for nautical skill, for fighting his ship, for his mode of boarding, and for resisting the enemy he is said not to have his superior in all England.'[33]

Mainwaring was the last in a line of great pirate leaders. After he surrendered there was a noticeable decline in the level of piratical activity. The admiralty records and the state papers are continuous throughout the period, but neither in these, nor in private correspondence, is there much mention of English piracy after about 1615. A few individuals are glimpsed briefly, but it is clear that English pirates were considered an irritant rather than a serious threat. Not that their decline owed anything to Mainwaring's timely submission. His men were as ready to return to their old ways as pirates had been in the past.

The reasons for this decline in English piracy are obscure. It

has been suggested that fuller employment amongst the maritime population and better pay and conditions meant that men were no longer desperate enough to break the law. However, this seems unlikely. The lot of the English sailor did not improve overnight anymore than did his character. Given the opportunity, most of the seamen who crowded the ports of England in the early seventeenth century would far sooner have turned a dishonest pound than an honest penny. Not that piracy was even seen as being essentially dishonest. There was little stigma attached to it (in the same way as there was little stigma attached to smuggling during the next century), particularly if it was directed against foreigners. The worst crime was to be caught. King James himself realised that the decline in piracy was not due to any moral reformation on the part of his subjects. As late as 1620 he told the Venetian ambassador that he believed that 'this accursed plague introduced by Queen Elizabeth by permitting piracy to her subjects, is even now too deeply rooted among this people.'[34]

It has been noticed that the decline in English piracy coincided with a decline in trade, in particular with the onset of the Thirty Years War in 1618 and the 'economic depression' of 1620–4. However, it seems unlikely that there is much connection. While English piracy was declining there was a marked increase in the activities of foreign rovers, especially during the 1620s and 1630s. Biscayners and Dunkirkers took many prizes, even in wartime when trade contracted, and incursions by Turkish rovers from Algiers and Sallee began to pose a serious threat to shipping in northern waters. Apart from raiding the British coasts, the Turks also crossed the Atlantic in search of plunder. In 1625 a squadron of Turkish pirates captured twenty-seven ships and took 200 prisoners in Newfoundland in an operation which was reminiscent of those of English pirates during the previous decade. If there was a decline in trade it is unlikely that it was of such proportions that commerce was unable to support the few thousand parasitic seamen who had lived so well from it during the early years of the century.

Naturally, as the threat from rovers (both English and foreign) increased, so did the vigilance of naval men-of-war.

The Dutch were perhaps the most unrelenting in their search for pirates. In the years in which they patrolled the British coast (1611–14), they had several successes. At least three pirate ships were captured in Ireland and in 1613 Dutch warships re-captured one of Mainwaring's prizes together with the *Nightingale*, one of the two ships with which he had originally set out from England. The English navy was slower to act, but after 1614 a stronger guard was placed on the Irish coast. Still, despite their increased vigilance and a few isolated successes, European naval forces cannot have been a real deterrent. In the game of hide and seek the odds heavily favoured the pirates. As one frustrated Stuart naval commander asked, how was it possible to guard hundreds of leagues of water with only a few ships?[35]

The changes outlined above must certainly have made the pirates' life more difficult, but neither individually nor collectively do they offer a convincing explanation for the rapid demise of English piracy after 1615. A more straightforward and acceptable explanation is the loss of the base which was crucial for the pirates' survival. The importance of Mamora for repairing and careening ships, for revictualling and for disposing of booty has been discussed earlier in this chapter. It was particularly important because of its strategic location close to the Spanish coast, the focal point of English piratical activity. (Furthermore, it was unique in that it was the only port on the coast of Morocco which was not in the hands of the Moors or the Spaniards.) In view of its strategic importance it is perhaps surprising that the pirates were able to hold on to it for so long. It had been blockaded by a Spanish force in 1611 and although they had failed to capture it they had temporarily blocked the harbour by sinking ships at the entrance. The Dutch were also anxious to drive the pirates from their lair. When the Spanish force which finally captured Mamora arrived they found the harbour was already blockaded by three Dutch men-of-war.

The victorious Spanish force dropped anchor in August 1614. In all there were ninety-nine ships and 7,000 men under the command of Don Luis Fajardo. Most of the pirates were out at sea in search of prizes and had taken few precautions to protect their base. The few who remained ashore made some attempt to

forestall the Spaniards, but Fajardo eventually succeeded in landing a strong force which encountered little resistance. When the Spanish entered the town they discovered that the pirates had fled with their loot, while the few ships that remained in harbour had been unloaded or burnt.

The Spanish capture of Mamora in August 1614 did not weaken the pirates immediately, but it did flush them from cover. Those who kept the seas during the following years were forced to lead a furtive existence. They could not dispose of their booty at their leisure, ships had to be hastily repaired or careened in remote bays and, perhaps hardest of all, there was no longer a thriving pirate community. The confederation had, in effect, been disbanded and its members thrown into a state of flux. Some, like Mainwaring, stayed at sea for a time and eventually received English pardons. Others gravitated towards the Mediterranean where the Grand Duke of Tuscany kept open house for English pirates. In October 1614, just two months after the fall of Mamora, a band of English pirates arrived at Leghorn in two ships, presented the duke with a gift of twenty slaves, and begged a safe-conduct for nine more of their ships which were laden with booty. Still others chose the service of the Turks. In June 1615 the *Susan Constance* of London was savagely attacked by six Algerine warships off Cadiz. Five of the Turkish warships were captained by Englishmen, no less than three of whom (William Clark, Thomas Kelly and Robert Walsingham) are known to have been prominent captains among the pirates of Mamora. However, relations between the English and Turks were severely strained, as we shall see in the next chapter, and it is questionable whether English pirates who served on Turkish warships were their own masters at all.

Thus it was that the new-found vigour and independence which English pirates had enjoyed in the Atlantic for more than a decade was finally shattered. Those who remained at sea were a sad reminder of the days when large fleets of pirates had defied governments and cowed naval vessels. Not until the formation of the Brotherhood of the Coast later in the century did the English manage to re-establish their lost reputation as a nation of pirates.

4

Teaching the Turks

By the end of the sixteenth century the English had established themselves as a force to be reckoned with in Mediterranean commerce. English merchantmen weighed anchor in the ports of London or Southampton, rounded the hostile coast of Spain and then continued their voyages deep into the eastern Mediterranean. English merchants had gained trading concessions in Turkey in the 1570s and 1580s and although the Venetians tried to prevent the English from trading directly with their islands in the Aegean and Ionian Seas, in practice they were powerless to prevent the lucrative exchange of northern commodities such as cloth, tin and grain for wine and currants.

It was only a question of time before English pirates followed in the wake of English traders – indeed, the two were not necessarily distinguishable. It was a short and profitable step to combine trading with piracy. Merchantmen which ventured into the Mediterranean often sailed heavily-armed and carried provisions for a year. When they were not fully laden, their quarterdecks and even their maindecks, which would normally have been used for the storage of goods, could be cleared ready for action. If the ship happened upon a likely prize the crew could soon store their loot on deck and once more resume the guise of innocent traders.

The attractions of this type of concealed piracy were obvious. The risk of discovery at home was small, especially if the crime was committed in distant seas against foreign vessels. The pretence – or reality – of trading was a good cloak for piracy and no doubt made it easier to dispose of the booty afterwards.

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Goods unlawfully acquired could be unloaded long before the 'merchantman' ever returned to England. Questions were rarely asked in the Turkish ports of the Morea or North Africa about how the goods had been come by. Indeed, the Turks must have been vaguely amused at the prospect of christian traders robbing each other and then selling their goods to them at bargain prices.

By the turn of the century there was probably no other nation so well equipped to pursue a course of piracy as the English. The saying 'none make better pirates than the English' soon passed into a proverb. (The phrase was coined by Joseph Scaliger, the Renaissance philologist and historian.) For this their history was partly responsible. England had been at war with Spain continually since 1585 and her sailors had gained considerable experience of sea fighting in Atlantic waters. It seemed almost inevitable that sooner or later the maritime struggle with Spain would be continued inside the Straits of Gibraltar. In 1598 the Venetian ambassador in Spain apprehensively wrote:

> ... the English, not content with piracy on the high seas, are thinking of the Mediterranean too, where they have begun to make themselves felt.

Once they had entered the Mediterranean, the advantages which the English had enjoyed on the ocean became even more apparent. They soon added a new dimension to the Mediterranean world of calm seas and oared-galleys. When storms blew the English did not need to put back to port. One Venetian official, whose term of office was bedevilled by the activities of English pirates and interlopers, observed in his frustration:

> They are accustomed to keep the sea even in midwinter and in the roughest weather, thanks to the handiness of their ships and the skill of their mariners.[1]

An important factor in the English success was their ships, which were generally called 'bertons' – possibly a corruption of 'Britania' or 'Bretagna'. These vessels, which had been so successful in the Atlantic, were an innovation in Mediterranean

seacraft. They were broad, round ships with three masts and seven square sails. They had two decks and were strongly constructed with a solid hull and a deep keel. Their build made them stable in rough seas and enabled them to carry as many as thirty heavy guns. They were not particularly large ships for their day – normally between 140 and 200 tons – and a full complement was only about sixty men. However, in battle they were vastly superior to the lightly-built and crowded Mediterranean galleys which were not strong enough to carry heavy armament and which could not stay at sea in rough weather.

The success of the English bertons caused considerable embarrassment to Elizabeth, especially in the Mediterranean where their attention seemed to be more focused on the goods and shipping of neutral countries than those of Spain. The French were amongst the first to suffer heavily at the hands of the English. In 1600, the Venetian ambassador at Constantinople voiced his fear that the complaints which the French made about their losses,

> ... will become general to all the powers, for this accursed race [the English] has grown so bold that it goes everywhere without hesitation, using barbarous cruelty, sinking ships, and carrying the booty into Patras and other ports where they find those who give them shelter.[2]

Elizabeth made several attempts to prevent English men-of-war from entering the Mediterranean, but without much success. The attractions of taking a rich prize inside the Straits were enough to divert many privateers from their legitimate hunting grounds off the Atlantic coast of Spain.

William Pierce's voyage was typical of this kind of piracy. He and a crew of Plymouth men, numbering about seventy, set sail late in 1602 in the *Elizabeth*, armed with letters of reprisal against Spain. After spending a fruitless six weeks off the Spanish coast they decided to try their luck in the Mediterranean, and after re-victualling at the Turkish ports of Tunis and Modone they succeeded in capturing the *Veniera* of Venice in Cretan waters. The *Veniera*, which was returning to Venice from Alexandria, was a particularly rich prize. Her cargo of indigo,

pepper, flax and hides was reported to be worth as much as 100,000 ducats (£25,000) and she had as human cargo, Zuane da Mosto, the retiring Venetian consul in Alexandria.

Pierce found little difficulty in selling most of his booty at Milos and disposed of the remainder in Turkish ports of call on his voyage home. It was not only the natives and merchants of these ports who purchased his wares. Crews of English ships which happened to be in port when he arrived had no scruples about buying contraband goods. For example, most of the crew of the *Blessing* of Plymouth made purchases at Milos and when Pierce called in at Santa Cruz he did business with the companies of six different English ships. When it docked at Plymouth, the *Veniera*, which the pirates had renamed the *Fox*, was seized on by the vice-admiral of Devon. Pierce, however, had already left his prize to join another Plymouth vessel which had landed him and his loot at Teignmouth. He was captured soon afterwards and sentenced to hang, but he evidently had influential friends. His father, who was a rich man living near Plymouth, may have been instrumental in persuading some of the members of the Privy Council to intercede for his son's life. However, Pierce eventually saved his own neck by revealing the names of his accomplices and paying 1,000 crowns to the Venetians to compound his crime – a sum which he cannot have found too much difficulty in laying his hands on.

At about this time the Venetians were suffering particularly heavy losses at the hands of the English. In March 1603, only a few months after Pierce had captured the *Veniera*, an even bigger prize fell to Captain Thomas Tompkins and his Southampton crew. Tompkins, like Pierce, was a young man with good connections, having served at court as a page to the Earl of Essex. His ship, the *Margaret and John*, had set sail from Southampton ostensibly for a cruise to the West Indies, but had soon altered course and entered the Mediterranean. Near Cyprus, Tompkins had encountered a towering Venetian argosy, the *Black Balbiana*, which was bound for Alexandria with silk, velvet, gold and silver cloth and many sacks of Venetian and Spanish coins. In the battle which ensued several of the crew of the Venetian vessel, including the master, were killed.

The shares from the capture of this prize, valued at 300,000 ducats (£75,000) by the Venetians, were considerable. Each of the twelve officers of the *Margaret and John* received over £1,000 and Tompkins's personal share amounted to £2,600 in silver, three hundredweight of cochineal and five gowns, besides large quantities of silk, damask and rich cloth. The pirates got ashore at Lymington with their loot and sent it into the country by cart. Six of them were soon caught and executed at Southampton, a seventh only escaping the same fate because of the entreaties of his 'honest parents'.[3]

Tompkins himself was not finally brought to trial until 1610, despite the relentless pursuit of the Venetians, and then only because he had the misfortune to be recognised by the king himself whilst presenting a petition. He showed no signs of remorse at his trial, saying that his only regret was that he had not slaughtered the whole crew of the Venetian ship. He was sentenced to hang, but received a pardon, probably because of his influential connections.

Venetian vessels were particularly vulnerable to attack because their main trading routes between Venice and Alexandria and Constantinople and Zante had to pass through, or perilously close to the islands of the Greek Archipelago, which provided an ideal haunt for pirate ships. The Venetian galleys were powerless to provide effective protection for their merchantmen, especially in the winter months. So frequent did captures become, that pirates found it more profitable to loot vessels and then allow them to proceed, knowing full well that they stood a good chance of re-capturing them when they had taken on another cargo. In 1603 alone, the Venetians lost twelve important ships to the pirates, the majority to the English. Small wonder that one English sea captain exhorted his fellow countrymen thus:

> You should come with me to the Levant, to find those sound and solid Venetian ducats which one may take without risk.[4]

Another reason for the Venetian's heavy losses may have been that most of their ships were insured. This at least was the belief of Giovanni Scaramelli, the Venetian secretary in London:

... this piracy has grown because there is a firm opinion here that all Venetians are secured fully, and sometimes for more than the value of the capital embarked, and the underwriters, either because they are isolated, or else occupied in more important affairs, neglect to press their just claims.[5]

From a purely practical point of view, a desperate, hungry crew of pirates must have enjoyed a considerable psychological advantage in battle over the crew of a merchantman who were defending the property of other men, which they knew in any case to be insured.

The sort of problems which English pirates caused Venetian officials in the island outposts of Venice's empire are shown in the case of Zante. The governor, Maffio Michiel, a particularly active and spirited official, believed in taking a hard line with pirates, and especially with the English, for it was his personal conviction that 'there is not a sailor of that nation but is a pirate.'[6]

One of Michiel's main problems was that after pirates had plundered vessels they could retire to the nearby Turkish ports of the Morea, and especially to Patras, Corone and Modone, where they could find a safe haven and a mart for their booty. Constantinople exercised only a halting control over the governors of these ports and probably cared little for the piratical activities of the English – especially while England was at war with Spain, Turkey's traditional enemy. Occasionally, some effort might be made to prevent Turkish officials from collaborating with pirates. For example, an enquiry was held into corruption at Modone after the populace had freed some English prisoners who were charged with piracy. Such investigations rarely achieved anything. On this occasion the sanjak of the Morea, who was in charge of the investigation, had himself been guilty of openly encouraging pirates.

Michiel's efforts to execute justice on pirates, were not, however, always frustrated, although when he eventually did succeed it brought disastrous repercussions for himself. The pirate in question was Captain Christopher Oloard of Dartmouth, a colourful character described as:

> ... rather small, dressed in black velvet trousers and jacket, crimson silk socks, black felt hat, brown beard, and shirt collar embroidered in black silk, age about thirty-two.[7]

Oloard, in the usual way, had taken a Venetian prize and brought her to Modone. What was unusual in this case was that the sanjak of the Morea, under pressure from Constantinople, had arrested the pirate and handed him over to Michiel, who was anxious to do justice on Oloard and two other English seaman whom he then held in gaol. The three pirates were duly tried at Zante and hanged from the tower of the castle, 'where they remained as a terror to all such evil doers.'[8]

Michiel must have been well pleased with himself. His term of office at Zante was over and he could leave the island having set a firm example to the pirates in the area. However, his success was short-lived. The ship which was carrying his possessions from the island was attacked by a band of English pirates who fell upon his belongings like 'mad dogs', destroying whatever they did not want, even to the point of killing some doves belonging to his womenfolk. The identity of the men who avenged Oloard's death is not known, except that they 'were all young and beardless, and among them were four or five captains; one was called Bully.'[9]

The type of piracy hitherto described in this chapter flourished between about 1598 and 1603, and was essentially the result of depredations committed by English traders and 'privateers', who hoped to escape detection in the general confusion of wartime. It mattered little whether seizures could be justified or not. All that mattered to the pirates was that they made a good profit and avoided paying for their crimes. Their booty was easily disposed of in Mediterranean ports, or else smuggled back home as discreetly as possible. Several of the crews of 'privateers' which passed the Straits of Gibraltar had the support – financial and otherwise – of some of the most powerful men in England. Sir Robert Cecil, secretary of state, and the Earl of Nottingham, lord high admiral, both had interests in privateering voyages which had been diverted to the Mediterranean where naked acts of piracy had been committed. Nottingham had actually admitted receiving six sacks of silver coins worth 4,000 ducats
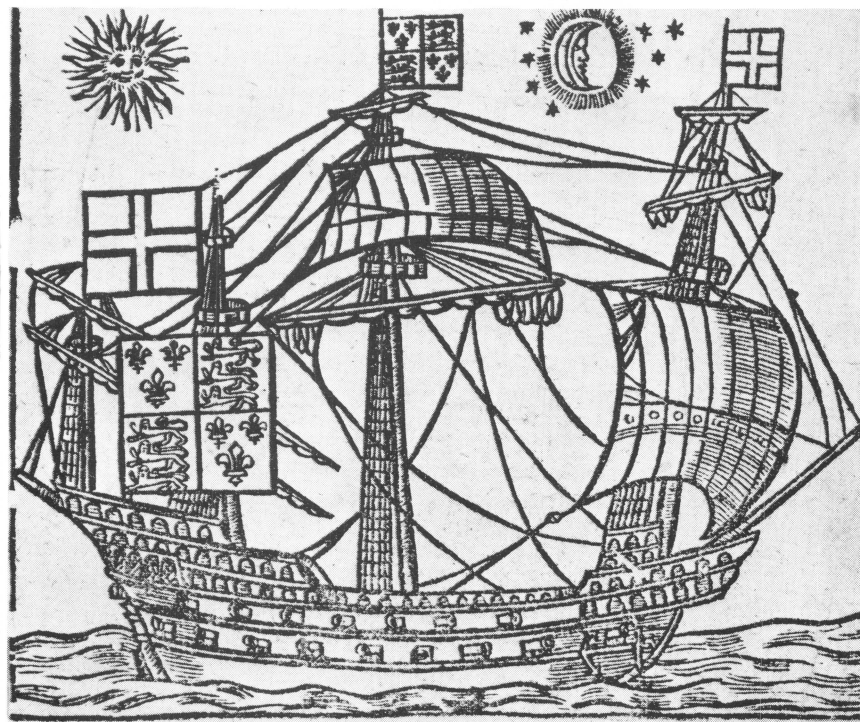
(above) An English 'ship of
warre' of the time of the
Spanish war. Service on ships
like this taught most early
Stuart pirates their seamanship

(right) The stamp of often
corrupt officialdom: the
signature and seal of Sir
Richard Hawkins, the King's
Vice-Admiral in Devon

SIGNATURE AND SEAL OF SIR RICHARD HAWKINS.
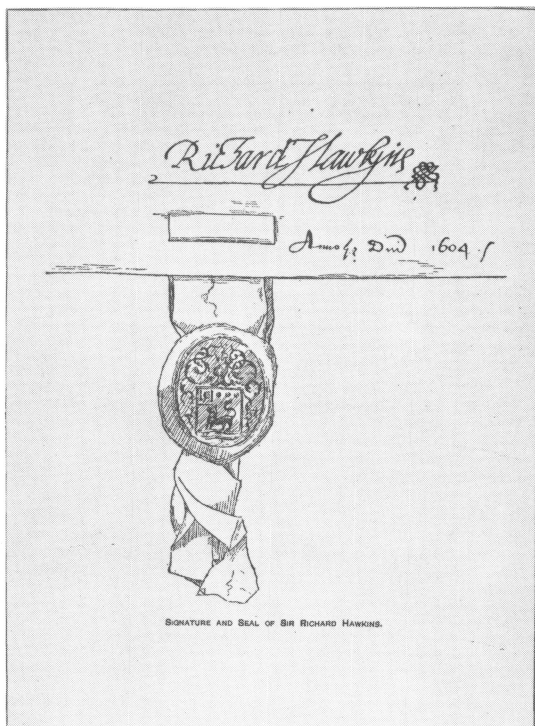
It shall be noe dishonor for the King to lett them beare the
charge of fitting the 'ships; in regard that he shall be fused
unto in that behalfe. And the favor is greate to them.
for by the lending of his maties ships they save half of
the whole charge wch now they are at in other ships.
Besides this busines may be negotiated privately betwixt
the Embassador and me, who hath direction to agree
wth me both for victualling and wageing the company.
And he is (in case his matie will favor them wth his ships)
to signifie unto his matie their good oppinion of me
And that it is thear desyre if I shall be found in soe
good estimation wth his matie that I should comand
those ships. But I vrge not my particular who
doe only ayme at the publique service. And for
my self will be willing in any condition whatsoever
to serve his matie and yor L. wth all humble and affec-
tionate service.

I humbly beseech yor L.   yor L. in all dewtie to be
to doe me the favor to lett   Commanded.
me know his maties pleasure
and yor L. commands./

F. Maynwaringe

(£1,000), part of the loot from the *Black Balbiana*, although he claimed that when he had accepted it he believed it to have been lawfully captured from Spaniards.

James's succession and peace with Spain changed all this. The Treaty of London was not finally signed until 1604, but all forms of privateering were made illegal by proclamation in June 1603. Henceforward private men-of-war could not be fitted out in England and any booty or money which might be brought home could not be disguised as lawful spoils of war. If English pirates were to continue to flourish inside the Straits, they needed to acquire an independence which they had hitherto lacked. They needed new bases outside England for manning, victualling, fitting and arming their ships and they needed new marts for the disposal and enjoyment of their loot. The fact that English pirates not only continued their activities after 1603, but actually stepped up their depredations, owes much to the career of one man, John Ward.

Nothing is known about Ward's early career except that he was born about 1553, probably in Faversham, Kent, and spent his early years as 'a poore fisher's brat'. At the start of James's reign he was living in poverty in Plymouth, probably with a chequered career of privateering behind him. Certainly a Captain John Ward is known to have been in gaol at Plymouth in 1602, charged with plundering a Danish ship in Spanish seas. Be that as it may, in 1603 Ward's fortunes were at their lowest ebb. To make matters even worse he was drummed into service in the Channel Squadron aboard the *Lion's Whelp* under Captain Thomas Sockwell (who, as we have seen, also became a notorious pirate captain). The drudgery of life in the navy at this time was one of the worst fates that could befall any man. Ward lasted just two weeks in the king's service, before he and a group of about thirty other malcontents deserted from their ship, stole a small bark out of Portsmouth harbour and put to sea.

The motley crew sailed to the Isle of Wight, where, in November 1603, they succeeded in capturing the *Violet* of London. Ward was not the leader of the pirates at this time. A contemporary pamphleteer said that he was known as 'Lack Ward'

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because of his cowardice, although in his subsequent exploits
Ward never showed any lack of courage or leadership. After
capturing the *Violet* the pirates sailed down-Channel. They
must have presented a sorry sight indeed. In effect, they were
just a ragged bunch of deserters who were probably driven on by
little more than a desire to keep themselves alive and the
memory of the lost days of privateering when they could live in
hope of capturing a rich prize which would provide a panacea
for all their problems.

When they reached the Scilly Isles the pirates had the good
luck to fall in with a French vessel, but such was the strength of
their ship that they could only hope to capture the Frenchmen
by guile. Accordingly, the majority of the pirates hid below
hatches while a few of their comrades up on deck engaged the
other ship in conversation. They continued thus for several
hours until their ruse finally succeeded and they came close
enough to board and overpower their quarry.

It was probably at about this time that Ward assumed the
leadership of the pirate band (Edward Fall, who had earlier led
the attack on the *Violet*, was captured and executed in May
1604). The possession of a reasonably seaworthy vessel marked
a turning-point in the desperadoes' fortunes. Putting back to
Cawsand Bay, a remote inlet near Plymouth, they took on new
recruits. They must all have known that they were marked men
in England and had little chance of saving their necks if they
were caught. Thus it was that in the summer of 1604 the band
left England behind them and set sail for warmer seas.

On his voyage south, Ward took a 100-ton flyboat north of
Lisbon and then entered the Straits. He sailed to Algiers, but
received a hostile reception there because Richard Gifford, an
English adventurer in the service of the Duke of Tuscany, had
recently attempted to burn the galleys in the harbour. He there-
fore continued to cruise the Mediterranean, increasing in
strength and wealth all the time. In December 1604 he was in
the waters of Zante, where he captured the *Santa Maria*, a
Venetian vessel laden with currants and silk, and on Christmas
Day that year he looted a Flemish ship of her cargo of pepper,
wax, and indigo.

Disposing of his loot in various Mediterranean ports, Ward then passed through the Straits once more to trim and victual his ship. It was while he was at Sallee, on the Atlantic coast of Morocco, that he was joined by twenty-three more Englishmen. These men, who had set sail in the *Blessing* with Dutch letters of marque, were in a sorry state, having been roughly handled by a Spanish warship. When they saw that Ward and his fellows were 'well shipped and full of monie' they needed little encouragement to leave their ship and join forces with them. Ward's numbers were further augmented at Larache, when another English crew threw in their lot with him. The captain of these men, Michael, soon returned home to England, but their lieutenant, Anthony Johnson, remained with Ward and became one of his most trusted men.

By 1605 Ward had succeeded in gathering a formidable force around himself. His man-of-war, which he had appropriately named the *Gift*, was a flyboat of 200 tons or more, mounting thirty-two guns and crewed by about 100 men. In addition to the *Gift*, he was accompanied in his marauding by any prizes which he thought might suit his purpose. His men were mainly English, but included a considerable number of Dutchmen. There was certainly no shortage of able seamen who were anxious to join his band. Ward's pamphleteer, Andrew Barker, had an even higher estimate of the pirates' abilities, saying that many of them were 'worthy spirits, whose resolutions, if they had beene aimed to honourable actions, either a sea or shore . . . might have beene preferred and commended for service to the greatest Prince living.'[10]

In 1603, Ward had been a common seaman, living in poverty and serving in terrible conditions aboard one of the king's ships. At fifty years of age it must have seemed that his best years were over. Now less than two years later, he was a rich man, the commander of a fine, strong vessel, and the respected leader of a large band of desperate men.

Ward's piracies continued throughout the winter of 1605–6. In November 1605 he was in the waters off Cyprus where he robbed a ship of Messina of silk, velvet and damask to the tune of £5,500. At about this time he also took a French prize laden

with spices, drugs and cotton in the roadstead at Modone, and followed this in April 1606 by capturing a Flemish ship off Sardinia, carrying a cargo of textiles. Such captures can only have served to emphasise the pirates' growing need for a secure base of operations where they could sell their booty and store their riches. By 1606 they had found such a haven with the Turks at Tunis. In August of that year, Ward was reported to be living in the city and to have helped some English seamen who were temporarily in difficulties.

Ward's protector at Tunis was Cara Osman, who, as head of the janissaries, had exercised absolute control over the city since 1594. An agreement was reached between the two men whereby Osman had first refusal of all goods which the pirates brought back to Tunis. The goods were then stored in Tunisian warehouses and resold to christian merchants at a considerable profit. Everything points to the fact that Ward and Osman enjoyed a good working relationship and they may have even become close friends, for the pirate called the Turk 'brother'.[11] The suspicion is, however, that Osman got the best of the bargain. Yet the pirates were utterly dependent on Osman's friendship, for without it they would probably have been denied the use of Tunis as a base. Thomas Mitton, a man who had lived at Tunis for three years and been to sea with Ward, testified to this when he gave evidence in the admiralty court:

> . . . the said Carosman is the onelie aider, asister and upholder of the saied Warde in his piracies and spoiles for that hee the saied Warde hathe noe other place to victualle in save onelie Tunis, and at Tunis hee coulde not victualle but by the meanes of Carosman whoe grauntethe him the saied Warde warrantes to take upp and buy victualles at Tunis and the Cuntrie thereaboutes. And the reason that moovethe the saied Carosman soe to doe is beecause when Warde takethe anie prize Carosman buyethe his goodes of him at his owne price.[12]

Ward's first voyage from his new-found base began in October 1606. Cara Osman paid one quarter of the costs of victualling the pirate ship, which was the *Gift*, Ward's old man-of-war. The crew was entirely English, except for twelve Turks

put aboard by Osman, who paid for their own keep. Ward did not have to wait long for his first prize. On 1 November, near Corone, he captured the *John Baptist*, 90 tons, a vessel belonging to some London merchants which was employed in the local coasting trade. At this capture the *Gift* had as consort a fifty-ton pinnace commanded by Anthony Johnson, and it seems reasonable to assume that the two ships had set out from Tunis together.

The next prize to fall to the pirates was a far richer vessel, the *Rubi*, a Venetian argosy of upwards of 300 tons, which was returning from Alexandria with a cargo of spices and 3,000 pieces of gold. The *Gift*, flying a Dutch flag, sighted the *Rubi* on 28 January 1607, forty miles off the coast of the Morea, and Ward and his men, no doubt making full use of the element of surprise, captured her by boarding 'verie suddeine, desperate and without feare'. Ward followed this success by taking another Venetian vessel, the *Carminati*, which was homeward-bound after a voyage to Nauplion and Athens. Well pleased with the way the voyage had gone, Ward returned triumphantly to Tunis with his two Venetian prizes under guard.

As in the early years of the century, it was the Venetians who once again had to bear the brunt of English depredations. They were, however, yet to suffer their most sensational loss.

Ward fitted out his ships and put to sea again early in 1607. This time he was in the *Rubi*, his Venetian prize which he had converted to a man-of-war and manned with a crew of 140, mostly English. Once again Cara Osman had bought a quarter share in the venture by providing the pirates with guns, powder, match and shot from the Turkish armoury. This time, however, there were no Turks on the expedition.

The event which shook the Republic of Venice, and so enriched the pirates, was the loss of the *Reniera e Soderina*, a 600-ton argosy. The great ship was taken as she lay becalmed near Cyprus by two pirate ships commanded by Ward, each said to be mounting forty guns and carrying at least 100 armed men. Amongst the fabulous cargo of the *Soderina* was indigo, silk, cinnamon and cotton worth at least £100,000 (one wildly exaggerated English report put her value at 'two millions at the

least').[13] It was not only the size of the financial loss which caused such a stir on the Rialto. The very manner of the *Soderina*'s capture was a disgrace to the Republic of St Mark. From one account of the battle it is clear that the crew of the argosy were terrified by the ferocity of the pirates' attack and offered little or no resistance:

> The captain, after deciding on the advice of everybody to fight, divided up all his crew and passengers, and stationed some on the quarterdeck, others on the maindeck and poop, and thus they all seemed to be very gallant soldiers with weapons in their hands. The two ships that came to attack, even though two or three shots were fired at them, strove without further ado to lay themselves alongside, and on coming within range fired off twelve shots, six each, always aiming at the crew and the sails, without firing once into the water. Their plans, designed to terrify, succeeded excellently, because two of those who were defending the quarterdeck were hit by one of their shots, and when they were wounded, indeed torn to pieces, all the rest fled, leaving all their weapons lying on the quarterdeck and all of them running to their own property, even while the two vessels were coming alongside. For all his efforts, the captain was not only quite unable to force the crew to return to the quarterdeck, he could not even make them emerge from below decks or from the forecastle. Indeed, the ship's carpenter and some others confronted him with weapons in their hands and told him that he should no longer command the ship.[14]

As if this prize were not enough, Ward proceeded to take another Venetian vessel before finally returning to his base. On a June day in 1607 he and his men dropped anchor at La Goletta, the port of Tunis, with booty worth at least 400,000 crowns. Ward did not want to prejudice his chances of getting a good price by landing the loot, and,

> . . . made many offers to carry away the shipp and goods to some other porte, because the said Carosman would not come to his price, and to that ende the said Warde rode out of command of the castle, and kepte his sayles at the yards, untill they had concluded.[15]

Eventually, Ward and Cara Osman agreed a price of 70,000

crowns – little more than one-sixth of what the goods were actually worth.

Ward was now at the height of his success. An English seaman who saw him at Tunis in 1608 has left us a description of the arch-pirate:

> Very short with little hair, and that quite white, bald in front; swarthy face and beard. Speaks little, and almost always swearing. Drunk from morn till night. Most prodigal and plucky. Sleeps a great deal, and often on board when in port. The habits of a thorough "salt". A fool and an idiot out of his trade.[16]

Ward fitted out the *Soderina* as his man-of-war and made preparations for his next voyage. She must have looked a fine ship indeed: 600 tons burden, mounting forty bronze pieces on the lower deck and twenty on the upper. He was at sea in her by December 1607, in command of an Anglo-Turkish crew of 400. However, the *Soderina* soon proved to be impractical as a warship. Her excessive armament weighed her down and her planks began to rot. As soon as Ward captured a prize he took command of her, leaving his cumbersome warship to her fate. The great vessel sank off Cerigo early in 1608 with the loss of almost all hands – 250 Turks and 150 Englishmen.

Yet this was just the start of a series of disasters that lay in store for Ward in the winter of 1607–8. First, the prize of which he had taken command was lost at sea and then a galleon, which he had captured and fitted out at Navarino, was wrecked. Worse still, one of his leading captains, a Fleming named Jan Casten, was off Modone on 21 March 1608 with two men-of-war and a prize, when he was surprised and defeated by the Venetian galleys. In this, one of their rare victories over the pirates, the Venetians killed fifty men, including Casten, and captured forty-four more.

Ward still continued to serve in expeditions from Tunis after these setbacks. He sailed with two Turkish captains to the Levant in 1609 and went on further expeditions in 1610, 1612 and 1618. He even appears to have had a hand in the capture of a Venetian vessel in 1622, when he must have been nearly seventy years old. However, he developed other interests and

stayed ashore more in his later years. He had soon become well-integrated into Tunisian society. By 1609 he had 'turned Turk', taking the name Issouf Reis, and he is known to have married another renegade, a woman from Palermo named Jessimina (despite the wife in England to whom he periodically sent money). Evidently his setbacks at sea still left him enough to enjoy his old age in luxury. The Scottish traveller Lithgow, who visited Ward at Tunis, dined with him in a 'faire Palace beautified with rich Marble and Alabaster Stones'. It was here that Ward lived with his most trusted followers – fifteen other English renegades, 'whose lives and Countenances were both alike, even as desperate as disdainfull'. Lithgow met Ward again in 1616, when he found that the old pirate had become interested in a method of incubating eggs in camel dung.

Ward's contemporaries in England wasted a great deal of vitriolic language on him and other English renegades, whom they saw in an almost medieval light, as having forsaken Christianity to espouse Islam. Yet one cannot but sympathise with the pragmatism of the pirates against the dogmatism of their day. Certainly Ward waged war on christian shipping, making no exception of English vessels, but stories that he would have robbed his own father if he met him at sea seem simply malicious. There was certainly another side to his nature. On at least two occasions he is known to have freed Englishmen who found themselves enslaved at Tunis, and Lithgow, who actually met the man, referred to him as 'Generous Waird'.[17] Ward probably died in a plague which ravaged Tunis in 1623 – a rather ignominious end for an old sea dog. He might have taken some comfort from the fact that his body was not buried on land but thrown into the sea.

The attractions of life at Tunis for an English seaman are not difficult to see. The city had a very rigid class system, the ruling class being the Turks, recruited mainly from the Levant, who made up the crack corps of the janissaries. It was impossible for Arabs, Berbers, Moors, Jews or Negroes to enter this ruling élite, but strangely enough, christian renegades were not barred from doing so. A renegade at Tunis in the early seventeenth century therefore enjoyed greater opportunities for social mo-

bility than he would have in his own country. Christian rene-
gades could rise to positions of considerable power in the
regencies of North Africa, and were not excluded from holding
even the office of *dey* or *bey*, as happened on occasion, although
no Englishman ever attained such eminence. Still, the position
of *reis* (captain of a corsair vessel) was a coveted post, bringing
with it opportunities for great wealth and adventure. Before he
assumed his command a *reis* had to be vetted by a council of
existing captains presided over by the admiral of the fleet. Such
a position clearly marked a man out as a member of the Turkish
élite.

'Turning Turk', as apostasy was called by pious contempora-
ries, was in reality a small price to pay for the chance of adventure,
wealth and power which it opened up. The English who aposta-
tised certainly looked different, for while their countrymen wore
their hair long, they 'clipp their beards verye nere or shave
them'.[18] External appearances apart, it is doubtful whether
renegades were called upon to pay little more than lip service to
their new religion. Laurent d'Arvieux, a French traveller who
visited the city later in the century, observed:

> Tunis is a country of liberty. Religion bothers nobody there;
> one prays to God when one wants to, one fasts when one cannot
> do otherwise, one drinks wine when one has money, one gets
> drunk when one has drunk too much.[19]

So welcome was the wealth which the English pirates brought
to the city that they were allowed to conduct themselves in a
manner which would not have been tolerated in anyone else.
In 1606, Le Sieur de Brèves, another French visitor to Tunis,
wrote:

> The great profit that the English bring to the country, their
> open-handed ways and the excessive debauches in which they
> spend their money before leaving town and returning to the war
> (for that is what this brigandage at sea is called), has made them
> cherished and supported by the janissaries above all other na-
> tions. No-one else is noticed there but them; they carry their
> swords at their sides and run drunk together through the town,
> without ordinary christian people, usually outspoken by nature,

daring to stand up against them. They sleep with the wives of
the Moors and when discovered, buy their way out of being shot;
the penalty which others have to suffer without remission. In
short, every kind of debauchery and uninhibited licentiousness is
allowed them: even that which is not tolerated among Turks
themselves.[20]

The English pirates at Tunis are probably only to be num-
bered in hundreds: one report of 1607 said there were 300 in the
city. And yet many of these men, because of their skill in
handling ships and artillery, became prominent members of the
corsair crews. Sampson Denball, a Dartmouth mariner (usually
known as Captain Sampson), was a man who rose to an even
more prestigious position in the fleet of Tunis than Ward. He
arrived at Tunis with Ward and accompanied him on several of
his early expeditions. However, he soon became a well-known
reis in his own right, commanding many successful expeditions,
particularly in Levant waters. He apostatised, taking the name
Ali Reis, and eventually became admiral of the galleons of
Youssef Dey (the Turk who ruled Tunis after the assassination
of Cara Osman in 1610).

Pleasant as life was at Tunis, the risks which the corsairs ran
at sea were ever-present. The worst fate that could befall a
renegade was to be captured by one of the christian corsairs
which were fitted out in Malta or in various other centres in
Spain, France and Italy. Sampson, for instance, was captured
in the summer of 1624, when, with only three ships, he was en-
gaged by 14 Maltese and Sicilian galleys commanded by the
Marquis of Santa Cruz. After a fierce fight lasting six hours the
Turks were defeated and Sampson was condemned to row in the
christian galleys – a hard end for a man who had tasted such
success.

Bad endings also awaited William Graves and Toby Glan-
ville, two other English pirates who achieved some prominence
at Tunis. Graves was at sea in 1609 as joint-master of a Tunisian
corsair which was captured by a French squadron. The French
took him to Marseilles where he was probably executed. Glan-
ville's luck held for slightly longer. Like Sampson he had
arrived at Tunis with Ward and was not finally captured until

1613, when he was serving in an Algerine warship which was captured at Sallee. Glanville's captor, an Englishman resident at Leghorn, decided to send the pirate back to England for trial, but Glanville, realising the game was up, made several attempts to commit suicide and eventually succeeded in throwing himself off the stern of the ship.

At first sight, it may seem surprising that English seamen were not also prominent in the corsair fleet of Algiers. In 1608, John Audley, who had been English consul in the city, reported that there were no more than a handful of Englishmen in the ships commanded by the famous Dutch pirate Simon Danser, who had established himself at Algiers in the same way as Ward had done at Tunis.

The lack of English pirates in the city can best be explained by the hatred and distrust which the Turks of Algiers had for the English. Several times during the early years of the century, Englishmen acting under guise of friendship plundered or destroyed Algerine vessels and carried off prisoners to slavery in christian countries.

The Turks had been willing to assist the crews of English ships in the belief that their primary object was to prey on the Spanish. However, the Algerines were soon disillusioned by a series of English betrayals. In 1604 Richard Gifford (secretly in the employ of the Duke of Tuscany) killed and wounded many Turks in an attempt to burn the galleys at Algiers. Later that year the *Hopewell*, master Richard Luxe, which had been freighted by the Turks for a voyage to Alexandria, was carried off by her English crew and the merchandise sold in Italy. Not long after this another Englishman helped some slaves to escape from Algiers, and in 1608 Richard Allen, acting English consul at the city, fled to Spain with three Turkish vessels and their cargoes valued at 300,000 pieces-of-eight (about £70,000).

The Algerines complained bitterly to King James, and it is greatly to his credit that, rather than treat the offenders as heroes in the fight against the infidel, he condemned them as pirates and murderers. The Turks were so incensed by the treachery of the English that after one incident the *divan* passed sentence of death on every English merchant in the city, by way

of reprisal. (The sentence was not carried out, but the merchants were forced to flee the city after paying a large fine.)

At this point it is worth recounting the experiences of two Englishmen who did serve with the Algerine corsairs. The first, Sir Francis Verney, tired of trying to obtain his disputed inheritance in England, sold up what possessions he had, as well as the family seat, and made his way to Algiers. He apostatised and went to sea as a Turkish *reis*, taking several English prizes, including one vessel containing a cargo of Bordeaux wine which had been destined for King James's table. He must either have been captured by Italian corsairs or fled to Italy, for in 1611 he was at Florence where he was described as a 'miserable runnagate'. Nothing is heard of him after this until his death four years later in the Hospital of St Mary of Pity at Messina.

The second Englishman who is known to have become an Algerine corsair was Ambrose Sayer, a Cornish gentleman. He had set sail in a privateer late in Elizabeth's reign, but the ship had been arrested by the Grand Duke of Tuscany for piracy and Ambrose had spent four years in a gaol in Florence, followed by three years in the hands of the Inquisition in Rome. He was finally sent to serve as a slave in the Spanish Sicilian fleet, but in 1610 he and some other protestant prisoners escaped in a ship and sailed to Algiers. He remained there for several years and became commander of a squadron of corsairs. During this time Sayer had plenty of chances to avenge himself on Catholic countries and he is known to have taken several French and Spanish prizes. He was the captain of the Algerine ship, already referred to, which was captured at Sallee in 1613 by an Englishman living at Leghorn. Like Toby Glanville, who was taken prisoner with him, Sayer was sent back to England for trial. He was convicted of piracy but appears to have managed to escape.

There were also opportunities for Englishmen to take service in the fleets of christian countries. By serving in Turkish vessels the English were only lending their weight to one side of a religious struggle dating back to the Crusades and which was destined to continue long after the seventeenth century. In the period which we are considering, the Turkish corsairs of Tunis and Algiers were alternately at war with most christian countries

and continually at war with certain states in particular, notably
Venice, Malta, Tuscany, Savoy, Genoa and Spain and her
dominions (which included Naples, Sicily, the Balearic Islands
and, from 1580 to 1640, Portugal). All these states had navies or
licensed corsairs, whose avowed aim was to raid Turkish lands,
harass Turkish shipping and search out and destroy Turkish
corsairs. The men who manned these christian vessels were
drawn from every country in Europe: English, Dutch, French,
Corsicans, Swiss, Greeks, Maltese, Italians – even Russians and
renegade Turks are to be found amongst their crews.

The English, however, are far more often to be found in
Turkish corsairs than they are in their christian counterparts.
The reasons for this are not difficult to see. Most men who be-
came pirates were foot-loose adventurers, men of dubious
character, who, in many cases, were outlawed from their own
country. As far as the Turks were concerned such a past was a
positive attribute. The janissaries, formidable fighters as they
were, were recruited from the dregs of the Ottoman Empire –
indeed, the corsair fleets of North Africa provided Constanti-
nople with a convenient dumping-ground for its most dissident
elements. As we have already seen, renegade christians were
welcomed into Turkish society and even the highest offices were
open to them. The christian corsairs, in marked contrast, were
composed entirely of a different type of man. For example, the
Knights of the Order of St John or St Stephen, who operated
from Malta and Leghorn respectively, were recruited from men
of noble birth who were obliged to take vows of poverty and
chastity. It would be naive to pretend that such vows were
rigidly adhered to, or that all vessels that sailed from Malta or
Leghorn were manned by saints – clearly the crews of christian
corsairs were bolstered up by men of little principle.

Nevertheless, it can be seen how difficult a man like John
Ward would have found it to gain command of a vessel had he
sailed to one of the centres of 'christian piracy' rather than to
Tunis. Even if he had managed to become a corsair captain, the
pickings which were open to him would have been far less at-
tractive than those which a Turkish *reis* might take, for the trade
of the Mediterranean was carried mainly in the ships of christian

countries, and as such would not have been legal prize for a christian corsair. (It is true that many corsairs did not adhere rigidly to their commissions, particularly as far as Greek shipping was concerned, but there was always the possibility that the injured merchants would later resort to litigation.) Thus, some of the richest prizes which fell to the Turkish corsairs, in particular the poorly-defended merchantmen of Venice, would have been forbidden fruit for rovers with christian commissions.

There was perhaps an even stronger deterrent to English adventurers who were tempted to seek their fortunes aboard christian corsairs. As protestants they would not have been particularly welcome in the Catholic countries of southern Europe, and especially in those lands where the Inquisition was active. The experience of Ambrose Sayer, already referred to, shows how easily a protestant could find himself chained to an oar in the galleys of Naples or Sicily. The power of the Inquisition also ran in Malta, that 'capital of christian piracy'. Peter Earle, who made a study of Maltese corsairs in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, found only one Englishman serving on corsair ships during the whole period and this man deserted after only three months.[21]

Inevitably some Englishmen are to be found aboard christian corsairs – principally on those fitted out at Leghorn, the major base for English trade in the Mediterranean. The main reason for this was the ambitious maritime policy of Ferdinand, Grand Duke of Tuscany, who for a short time offered asylum to English pirates in spite of the religious and diplomatic embarrassment that was caused by his action. The Duke of Savoy was so jealous of the wealth and prosperity of Leghorn that he too offered a free pardon for pirates, with the result that in 1613 Peter Easton and his band entered Villefranche with their ships and booty. However, neither Easton's men nor the pirates who settled in Tuscany had much impact on the 'war of the corsairs' in the Mediterranean. Most of the pirates either made their way home or else got passage to Mamora, where they resumed their old profession.

The duke had intended to send Easton as commander of four Savoyard ships which were to attack Venice, but the ships were

destroyed by a storm at Villefranche on 23 October 1613 and Easton's nautical skills never appear to have been called on again. Easton showed no loyalty to his old shipmates and rid himself of them at the earliest opportunity, most of them leaving Italy for good. Of the English pirates who settled at Leghorn at this time, Captain Thomas Francke is only known to have made one unsuccessful voyage, and Captain Lording Barry only remained a few years before returning to England to seek a pardon.

Possibly the *corso* as it was practised in Italy was an unattractive proposition – it must have been hard for any man who had been a pirate to practise pillage by prearranged rules. In the event, Tuscany and Savoy only appear to have been used as temporary places for pirates to return to so long as an English pardon was not forthcoming.

Successful as English pirates were in establishing themselves in Turkish ports, their success was short-lived. There were comparatively few Englishmen at Tunis, which meant that they were soon obliged to put to sea in ships which were overmanned by Turks and Moors. Indeed, the organisation of Turkish corsairs required that each vessel should have an *aga*, or captain of the janissaries, who was responsible for the conduct of the voyage. Thus the sailors or the naval captain cannot be said to have been in command of the ships in which they served. Another reason that the English renegades were generally in the minority at sea was because the financial backers of corsair voyages wanted to ensure the safe return of their investment. To this end they sometimes kept English hostages on shore as security while their ships were at sea.

It will be remembered that the English pirates at Tunis did little to endear themselves to the Turks by their riotous behaviour whilst in port, and it is hardly surprising that friction between the two races often erupted when they were at sea. Christian renegades were naturally distrusted by the Turks, who suspected that they might resort to treachery at any moment. On one occasion all the Turks aboard a corsair vessel were slain by their christian shipmates and another time deep suspicion was aroused when a Tunisian vessel manned by an Anglo-Turkish crew was 'captured' by a Maltese corsair. After the *Soderina*

had sunk with the loss of 250 Turks, feeling at Tunis ran so high
that Ward would have been torn apart on his return to the city
had it not been for the timely intervention of his protector
Cara Osman.

Another reason for the demise of the English was simply the
depletion of their numbers. When the *Soderina* went to the
bottom she took with her 150 Englishmen, a loss which must
have been severely felt, since the English pirate community at
Tunis never numbered more than a few hundred. Besides losses
at sea or in battle – natural hazards for any pirate – there were
also losses through desertion. Some English pirates seem to
have developed a genuine conscience about serving Islam. In
particular, men such as Richard Bishop detested being involved
in the capture and enslavement of their fellow countrymen.
Such men of scruple could either seek passage home on a passing
merchantman, or join the English pirates in the Atlantic whose
operations were not subject to Turkish direction.

There was a lack of new blood to make good such losses and
even if there had not been it is doubtful whether the Turks
would have welcomed any more Englishmen into their midst.
Thus, by 1609, it was credibly reported that in the whole of
Tunis there were no more than thirty Englishmen remaining
with Ward.

1609 was indeed a crucial year for the survival of those
renegades who remained in Turkish ports. On the night of 30
July a Spanish fleet commanded by Don Luis Fajardo sent
fireships into the harbour of La Goletta and destroyed at least
twenty-two vessels – the flower of the newly created Tunisian
fleet. It is perhaps significant that the fireships were piloted into
the harbour by Hunt, a Plymouth man, who was well rewarded
for his services. Following closely on the heels of this disaster,
Simon Danser, the Flemish renegade, fled Algiers in the autumn
of 1609 to go to Marseilles, where a French pardon awaited
him. He took with him 400,000 crowns and four ships and left
behind 150 dead Turks with whom he and his men had quar-
relled.

The situation of those christian renegades who remained be-
hind in Turkish ports in 1609 was, therefore, precarious in the

Deposition of the pirate Richard Bishop, confessing to the detention for two years of surgeon William Stuttfield, captured off Ireland, who 'in regarde of his arte and skill in chirurgerie they woulde by noe means lette goe'

Special treatment at the end: a convicted pirate on the gallows at Execution Dock, Wapping – the pirates' own 'Tyburn Tree'

extreme. There was speculation about Ward's survival and the pirate himself is known to have been negotiating for a Tuscan pardon at this time. In the event the English did survive, but with one marked difference: those who remained were almost certainly obliged to apostatise. As the contemporary Dutch historian Van Meteren observed in his *Histoire des Pays-Bas*, published in 1618:

> Ward, Verney and others stayed on there, but as they were no longer free to go to sea, they gave the impression of remaining in the service of the Turks or even of becoming Turks themselves.

What then did the English pirates achieve during the few brief years of their ascendency? Their main achievement was that they taught the Turks to sail 'round' ships. Captain Foucques, a Frenchman who was enslaved at Tunis, reported that when Ward arrived in 1606 the city had only 2 or 3 galliots, but that by 1609 La Goletta was sheltering 12 sailing ships of more than 300 tons burden, 4 or 5 pinnaces, 6 galleys and 3 oared-frigates. Van Meteren's description of the vessels destroyed in Fajardo's raid in the same year is more informative. There were 2 vessels of 750 tons burden, several of more than 500 tons, 16 warships and a galley, mounting in all 435 pieces of ordnance – an average of about 20 guns a ship. Although the Tunisian fleet was practically destroyed in Fajardo's raid, it was not long before the corsairs were once again disrupting shipping and they must have soon managed to reconstruct their fleet, for in 1612 a Venetian who visited Tunis reported that there were 4 galleons, 12 frigates and 6 galleys in the harbour.

The importance of the English renegades in teaching the Turks the 'art of navigation' was a scandal which was well-known to contemporaries and which has been generally recognised by modern historians. However, it is necessary to make some qualifications. The Atlantic galleon had been introduced into the Mediterranean before Ward arrived at Tunis: for example, in 1601 Fra Giacomo de Liége is known to have fitted out a galleon from the 'west' at Malta. Neither can the English claim credit as being the only race who handed on their skills to the Turks. Other christian seamen, principally Dutch

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and French, were also operating from Turkish bases – for example, Simon Danser, a ship's master from Dordrecht, who brought about similar changes in the Algerine marine to those which Ward effected at Tunis. Finally, some credit should be given to the Turks and Moors themselves, for they soon learnt to fit out vessels better than their masters. While northern European countries were building heavy ships with magnificent carving and paintwork, the Turks concentrated on performance, keeping decoration and other adornments to a minimum. Turkish corsairs were plain vessels without lofty upperworks. They were regularly careened and their clean hulls were so 'nimble' that they had little difficulty in escaping from English naval vessels in all but the roughest seas. Thus in 1620, when the English fleet that was sent against Algiers encountered some pirates of that city, the English admiral, Sir Robert Mansell, could only marvel 'in how short tyme thoas ships outsayled ye whoal fleet out of sight.'[22]

The introduction of the sailing ship to North Africa did indeed constitute a nautical revolution. The advantages which the galleon enjoyed over the galley have already been mentioned. The logical outcome of this superiority was spectacular. Depredations by Turkish corsairs increased dramatically. They were no longer confined to plundering during the summer months as they had been in galleys, but were able to seek their prizes all year round. The heavy armament and seaworthiness of sailing ships enabled the Turks to venture further afield with increasing confidence, until, by the 1620s, they were conducting raids not only outside the Straits but in American and British waters, and even as far north as Iceland, which was raided by a band of Algerine corsairs as early as 1627.

Not that the sailing ship ever entirely replaced the galley – it merely increased the operational flexibility of the North African marine. Galleys, and the smaller versions such as galliots and brigantines, remained indispensable for use in inshore work and in calms, when they might even have been useful for towing sailing ships! For much of the work of the corsair the two vessels were complementary and indeed made a very effective combination when used in conjunction with one another.

The dramatic impact of the introduction of the sailing ship to North Africa has tended to obscure another innovation which went hand-in-hand with it. This was the part which the renegades played in teaching the Turks how to handle artillery. The traveller Lithgow was well aware of this and wrote:

> ... if it were not for our Christian Runnagates ... who have taught the Turkes the airt of navigation, and especially the use of munition; which they both cast to them, and then become their chiefe Cannoniers, the Turkes would be as weake and ignorant at sea, as the silly Aethiopian is inexpert in handling of armes on the Land.[23]

It may be remembered how the deadly fire of Ward's ships struck terror into the hearts of the enemy when they attacked the *Soderina*. Such skill must have been the result of considerable training and indeed, in the summer of 1609 we find that Ward escaped the fury of the Spanish attack on the Tunisian fleet because he was ashore 'training men and casting Ordnance'.[24]

The absence of North African prize registers for the first half of the seventeenth century makes it difficult to quantify the extent of Turkish depredations after the introduction of the galleon. A Venetian who visited Tunis in 1612 estimated that Cara Osman and other Turkish associates and financiers had made at least six million (French crowns?) through backing corsair voyages. Such figures should be viewed sceptically, but it is certain that investment in Turkish corsairs became a very attractive proposition after the arrival of the christian renegades. The very fact that France, Spain, England and Holland all mounted expeditions against the pirates in the first twenty years of the century bears witness to the increasing disruption which the corsairs were causing to European commerce – both inside and outside the Straits.

Venetian shipping was particularly vulnerable to attacks by pirates, and on at least one occasion the Venetians were temporarily forced to abandon one of their most lucrative trading routes because of the threat of capture by Ward and his men. This was in 1607, when the convoys to Syria and Egypt did not dare leave Venice.

A study of the records of two insurance companies from 1592 to 1609 shows that in these years 250–300 ships entering and leaving Venice fell victim to christian or moslem corsairs. During the same period, about 360 vessels were lost through storm and shipwreck.[25] Apart from English and Dutch pirates, the Venetians also suffered at the hands of Maltese, Tuscan, Savoyard and Spanish corsairs. From this, Fernand Braudel has calculated that, on average, between 138 and 166 vessels of all nationalities engaged in Mediterranean trade were taken by corsairs in *each* of these years.

This calculation is based on the assumption that Venetian shipping represented approximately one-tenth of Mediterranean trade. This is, however, probably an under-estimation of pirate damage, because Braudel took Tenenti's figures to represent *total* Venetian losses during this 18-year period, whereas they were in fact losses recorded by only two Venetian insurance companies.

It is impossible to say what share of these captures went to English pirates and renegades, but it must have been a significant proportion. The period 1592–1609 saw the depredations of the English inside the Straits reach their peak, and this is reflected in the complaints of Venetians and other foreigners who regarded English pirates as being among the prime offenders.

The ships of northern Europe were not immune from attack, either. In May 1609 it was reported that forty English vessels had been taken by Turkish pirates and in September the losses of London merchants alone were estimated at over £200,000. Insurers in London refused to give cover for voyages to the Straits at this time, and even the better-armed ships of the Levant Company proved vulnerable. As Samuel Calvert observed: 'Our [Turkey] merchants grow confused and poor in their returns since the pirates thriving at sea.'[26]

It was not long before the bigger merchants learned to fend for themselves. By 1618 the Levant Company had built some especially strong ships which, in convoy or not, were a match for any squadron of corsairs. However, such resources were not available to all, and smaller merchants, especially those trading from the western ports of England, continued to suffer heavy

losses. In 1617 Sir Ferdinando Gorges informed the mayor of Plymouth that 300 English and Scottish ships had been captured by the Turks in only a few years – a figure which the Privy Council endorsed – and almost two years later, in February 1619, the western ports alone were said to have lost 400 sail.

Whether or not such round figures are reliable there are certainly many instances of small English ships being snapped up at this time, and presumably other countries were suffering similar losses. In 1616 7 English fishing boats returning in convoy from Newfoundland were set upon by 30 Turkish warships, which sank 2 of them and captured the rest. Three years later, small ships from London, Bristol, Plymouth and Weymouth all fell victim to the Turks. Most prizes were usually barks of 100 tons or less, crewed by only a handful of men. If English, they might be bringing fish from Newfoundland or trading in cloth and other northern commodities. Their individual value might have been small, but their loss must have represented a severe blow to small-time traders and fishermen who could least afford it.

This then was the real legacy of the English pirates; that they left behind them in the ports of North Africa a formidable force of potentially hostile corsairs who continued to be a running sore in the side of European commerce long after the English had disappeared from their midst.

5

Pirates of the Thames

For though Pyrates exempted be
From fatall Tyburne's wither'd tree,
They have an Harbour to arrive
Call'd Wapping, where as ill they thrive
As those that ride up Holbourne Hill,
And at the Gallows make their Will
– Samuel Rowlands, *Knave of Hearts*, 48

Proportionately, the Thames was the scene of more acts of piracy than any other stretch of water in England, owing to the number of vessels on the river and the existence of a large number of disaffected seamen who lodged in the shanty settlements east of London Bridge. Of eighty-six indictments drawn up in the High Court of Admiralty for piracies committed on the English coast between 1603 and 1640, no less than fifty-one relate to depredations on the Thames. Although the records of the London court might be expected to exaggerate the relative importance of Thames-side crime, it is nevertheless clear that London was an important centre of piracy.

It might seem strange that such crimes should find a place in a history of piracy, especially when the robbers did not even need a boat from which to launch their attacks. For example, when one band of rogues spied the *Green Hat* of Dordrecht lying in the mud below Gravesend, they took off their shoes, rolled up their hose and waded through the ooze towards their 'prize'. When they clambered aboard they discovered the crew had gone ashore, and proceeded to ransack the ship. Despite the circumstances, this crime and many others like it were treated as piracy. The reason for this was the territorial division between the admiralty and the common law courts. Piracy was simply the maritime equivalent of robbery; whether a crime was piracy or robbery depended on where it was committed. The jurisdic-

tion of the lord high admiral extended all round the coasts of England up to high water mark (whether the tide was in or not), and as far up the rivers as the lowest bridges. If a crime which would have constituted a robbery on land was committed in the admiral's jurisdiction, then the criminals were likely to be treated as pirates.

Apart from the legal definition, there is ample justification for treating such crimes as piracy rather than robbery. Most of the offenders were seafaring men who made their living from the water in some way or other: usually as sailors, ferrymen, or fishermen. The value of prizes may have been small compared with captures made by pirates on the high seas, but then there were fewer men involved, so shares tended to be larger. The type of piracy could vary enormously. Some crimes occurred as the impromptu result of a heavy drinking bout in a waterside tavern; others were planned and executed by organised bands who successfully managed to escape detection for many years. If some of the unfortunates who were caught do not seem to merit the description of 'pirate', the same could be said of many of their brethren who were at large on the ocean. The sentence was the same for all and, perhaps because of this, river and coastal pirates could be every bit as desperate and violent as pirates on the high seas.

The two types of piracy were not completely separate, however. Some of the most illustrious pirate careers had the humblest of beginnings. All of John Ward's wealth and magnificence can be directly traced back to the small bark which he and his men boarded in Portsmouth harbour. Many small-time pirates began with similar ambitions of building up their strength and riches. Some, like Ward, given patience, perseverance and luck, actually graduated to the ranks of the deep-sea pirates; most cruised aimlessly about, plundered a few weak vessels and then ran ashore with their loot.

Spoils were committed all round the English coast in the early seventeenth century, but in this chapter it is intended to concentrate on one area only – the River Thames and its estuary. Because London was the seat of the High Court of Admiralty, crimes on this stretch of water were more likely to come to light

than those committed elsewhere. Accounts of piracy in the out-ports and on the coasts are rare, but the record of piracy in the capital is continuous and detailed. There is probably more evidence relating to piracy on the Thames in this period than almost anywhere else. During the first half of the century nearly a third of all piracy indictments in the High Court of Admiralty were for spoils committed on the Thames itself.

Riverside piracy was not exclusively a seventeenth-century phenomenon. John Stow, in his *Survey of London*, made mention of piracy on the Thames in medieval times. He tells how the Londoners sent out a fleet of ships in 1216 which succeeded in capturing many pirates, 'besides innumerable others that they drowned, which had robbed on the river of Thames'.[1] Stow's next mention of riverside piracy comes more than two centuries later. One night in the spring of 1440, six foreign vessels lay anchored in the Thames after unloading cargoes of fish which they had brought to London for Lent. As the crews were sleeping, a band of pirates stole alongside in a barge, cut their throats and threw the bodies overboard. After pillaging the ships the pirates sank them in an effort to hide all trace of their crime, apparently unsuccessfully, for two of the offenders were caught and hung in chains on a specially raised hill at East Smithfield in full view of the river.

From these two isolated examples it can be seen that riverside piracy was nothing new in the seventeenth century. Indeed, it was destined to continue well into modern times. Bracebridge Hemyng, the Victorian author, wrote in about 1870 that 'for a long time piracy and smuggling had been going on in the river just below the bridge', and furnished his readers with stories of bands of cut-throats who operated from hideouts in Limehouse and Wapping in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Because Thameside pirates were parasites who lived off the trade of London, their activity was closely linked with the life and vitality of the metropolis. London in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries was undergoing an expansion, the like of which had not been seen in England before. By 1603 its population was probably approaching a quarter of a million. In sheer size it dwarfed every other city in the kingdom.

London's wealth was prodigious too. In 1619 the city's share of the naval expedition which was sent against the pirates of Algiers was assessed at £40,000 – more than four times the sum of all the other ports put together! Merchants in the provinces, jealous and fearful of the rapid growth of the capital, voiced fears that the head was becoming too great for the body to support; that the growth of London was sapping the nation's strength. Such fears were not completely unfounded. To feed and clothe so large a population presented problems for which the government was completely unprepared. Yet the city did not starve: it continued to grow. Carts came from further and further afield laden with food and dairy produce and barks navigated the Thames to meet the growing needs of the city, while the Newcastle colliers beat up and down the east coast in an effort to keep the Londoners warm.

Seaborne traffic was the secret of London's spectacular growth and the Thames, as the main highway of traffic, was the artery connecting the heart of the city with the rest of the world. Foreigners who visited London came away impressed not only with its size and wealth, but also with the importance of the river. Paul Hentzner, who was in the city in 1597, observed that:

> The wealth of the world is wafted to it by the Thames, swelled by the tide, and navigable to merchant ships through a safe and deep channel for sixty miles from its mouth to the City.[2]

From docks all along these sixty miles of river vessels sailed on voyages of trade and discovery. Most of the important trading companies of the day were firmly established in London. As trade grew and ships increased in size, so larger docks were constructed downstream further away from the city at places such as Ratcliffe, Wapping, Greenwich, Deptford, Woolwich and Gravesend. The proliferation of shipping on the Thames was picturesquely described by William Camden, when he remarked that 'a man would say, that seeth the shipping there, that it is, as it were, a very wood of trees disbranched to make glades and let in light; so shaded is it with masts and sailes.'[3]

The importance of the river in London's trade was matched by its importance for transport and communications within the

city. The streets of old London were crowded, unhealthy and unsafe for travellers. Many of the roads were still unpaved and the risk from footpads was compounded by the increase in the numbers of carts and coaches. Apart from carts delivering produce, the streets were clogged up by private and public coaches, known to contemporaries as 'Hackney hell carriages', which were totally unsuited to negotiating the intricate and over-crowded streets and passages of medieval London. Small wonder that people took to the river. Travelling by water was more soothing, less noxious and far quicker. It was also essential for travellers wishing to cross from one side of the river to the other. Stuart London was only blessed with one bridge over the Thames. Even for those wanting to visit the theatres and pleasure houses on Bankside, the river was by far the most convenient form of travel.

The taxi-drivers of Elizabethan and Jacobean London were the wherrymen – oarsmen and scullers who plied for hire in their small boats or wherries along the numerous water stairs and landing places. It has been said that there were 'as many wherries on the Thames in early Stuart times as there were gondolas in Venice.'[4] Stow put their number at 2,000 in West-minster, the City and Southwark alone. John Taylor, the 'water poet', thought that if all the dependants of these watermen were included, then the number of those who lived 'by the oar and skull, betwixt the bridge of Windsor and Gravesend, cannot be fewer than forty thousand.'[5]

Thus, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Thames played a part in London life which it is difficult to appreciate today. The hustle of trade and the frantic activity on the river was not, however, without its seedy side. It was only natural that as seaborne trade began to utilise docks further down river, new settlements should appear east of the city which were mainly inhabited by seafarers and others who relied in some way on the river for a living. Growth took place on the north bank, on Tower Hill, at St Katherines, Ratcliffe, Shadwell, Limehouse, Poplar and Wapping, and on the south bank, at Redruth and Rotherhithe. The burial registers of these places bear ample witness to the seafaring character of the new settle-

ments, being full of the names of sailors, mariners, shipwrights, anchorsmiths, chandlers, carpenters, ropemakers and others who looked to boats and ships for their livelihood.

Despite government attempts at control, London's eastward expansion was haphazard. The whole area soon became a maze of wharfs, docks, piers, small creeks and crowded houses. Buildings sprang up almost overnight, often in defiance of government proclamations. Stow bemoaned the deterioration that had taken place close to his own native Ratcliffe, where he had witnessed the construction of 'a continuall streete, or filthy straight passage, with Alleyes of small tenements or cottages builded, inhabited by saylors' victualers'. The riverside east of London, which even in the late sixteenth century had still been regarded as a rural retreat from the overcrowding and filth of the city, became, in only a short space of time, a place to be shunned even more than the city, especially when the plague was raging. At least one contemporary believed the plagues of the first half of the seventeenth century to have been imported to London aboard foreign ships and to have first gained a foothold in the overcrowded and insanitary conditions prevailing in the East End.[6]

Not only was the East End a fertile breeding ground for the plague, it also provided ideal conditions in which crime could flourish. There was, of course, no proper police force in Stuart England and law and order were little in evidence. This was particularly true of the new developments, which were outside the city's jurisdiction. The attitude of the government was to isolate the crime which existed within these areas and to try to prevent it from spreading to the city. For example, when East Enders caused trouble in the more law-abiding districts of Lambeth and Southwark, the Council's solution was to impose a curfew and to forbid passengers from being ferried over from Ratcliffe, Blackwall and Wapping after nine o'clock at night. Still, London could not hope to exclude completely the population of the new areas, and the eastern settlements soon had the reputation of being 'a great source of beggars and other loose persons swarming about the City'.[7]

Alehouses, always prime centres of crime and disorder, ex-

panded rapidly along the whole waterfront. In 1630, the justices of Wapping reported that they had closed down as many as twenty-six taverns in Wapping itself, but this still left a total of thirty-seven to serve the needs of the inhabitants. Because of the periodic and seasonal nature of their employment, sailors and fishermen usually had plenty of time to idle away. Alehouses provided ideal meeting-places and information centres where trouble-makers and the criminal elements had ample opportunity to drown their sorrows, hatch their plots and recruit allies and helpers.

Usually the pirates who met in the alehouses to the east of the city went downstream to look for their prey. Some went as far as Gravesend or Tilbury before attempting to capture a vessel, and the more adventurous posed a threat to shipping in the estuary and even attacked vessels further out to sea. In 1613, a band of about ten men commandeered a fishing boat at Leigh and sailed to Shoeburyness, where they succeeded in capturing a better boat. They then sailed up the coast as far as Orford Ness, where they robbed the crew of the *Golden Cock* of Haarlem. Seizing the *Desire* of Barking, they sailed to the south side of the estuary, and off Reculver attacked the *Cock* of St Omer, making off with her cargo of lawns and cambrics worth nearly £200. Getting ashore at Gillingham, the pirates made their way overland to London and were able to dispose of some of their loot at St Bartholomew's Fair. Only two men, Thomas Brooker, a ship's carpenter from Rochester, and Henry Stakes, a gunner from Somerset, were ever brought to trial for this crime.

The lord admiral's jurisdiction on the Thames only extended as far as London Bridge, so only attacks on shipping below the bridge were treated as piracy. The dividing line between piracy and robbery was, however, more than just a purely legal distinction. Old London Bridge, supported by a series of narrow arches, and straining under the weight of houses and shops, provided a serious obstacle to shipping on the river. Vessels of burden could not pass the bridge and had to anchor downstream, where they either unloaded their cargoes or transferred them to smaller craft for the journey upstream. It was because ships of size and consequence were confined to the waters east of

the bridge that acts of piracy were likely to be of greater consequence than robberies committed higher up the river.

Still, some piracies were little more than drunken forays which were ill-conceived and ended disastrously. Five days before Christmas 1607, Garret Scottle and some friends boarded a wherry after a heavy drinking bout in a Limehouse tavern. Rowing downstream, they encountered a hoy lying between Greenwich and Deptford. Boarding the ship, they took £50 in coin before fleeing ashore. Scottle was the only one to be caught and he paid for his indiscretion with his life.

Most crimes, however, were more carefully planned and executed and few of the offenders were ever caught. It was not difficult for pirates to gain intelligence of vessels newly arrived in the river with details of their cargoes, for such news travelled fast amongst the seafaring community. Likely ships could be reconnoitred to see how well they were guarded or, alternatively, bands of men could simply row downstream in the hope of encountering some suitable prize.

There was little risk of these pirates being caught. The navy was responsible for patrolling the river, but usually only one ketch or pinnace was employed on active service at a time. During the first half of the century, the navy appears to have had only one isolated success – in 1629 when a naval ketch challenged the *Angel* of Halstow at Tilbury and arrested a band of sailors who had recently captured her. The lords of the admiralty had little appreciation of the difficulty of preventing piracy on the river. In 1633 they wrote to Captain Coke, the commander of the king's ship, upbraiding him for his failure to stop the 'dayly pilfrings and insolencies comitted in the Ryvers of Thamise and Medway by pyrattes, pickerons and pettie men of warre.'[8] With only one ship the task was impossible. Pirates often knew the whereabouts of the patrol vessel and were able to choose the time and place for their attacks carefully.

The only other means of preventing piracy was to arrest any suspicious persons and to stop wherries which were carrying abnormally large numbers of men (although members of a band could easily avoid detection by travelling overland and meeting their accomplices at a prearranged destination). In 1613, after a

complaint had been received from the Merchant Strangers in London concerning the increasing number of depredations on the river, the Council declared that the problem was caused by 'loose and ill disposed marriners and other seafaringmen as are suffered to passe in wherries and other boates by that towne of Gravesende, and soe falling further downe joyne themselves in partnershipp and sease upon such pinckes and boates as they fined fitt'.[9] The Council's remedy was for the searchers of Gravesend to take into custody any suspicious-looking men who could not account for their employment.

The searchers were soon able to report that they had indeed arrested several suspects who 'without all doubt were mynded to have putt som suche lyke matter in practis.'[10] Such a course of action was clearly impractical and can only have been prompted by desperation. Men could not be charged with crimes before they had committed them, and keeping suspects in prison was a costly business. It was impossible to hold every suspicious-looking person on the busiest stretch of water in the world.

Because some of the most successful pirates were never caught, references to them appear only briefly in the records of the period. In 1620, a man whose fishing trawler had been taken by a band of pirates at Holehaven, described the leader as a man 'called Will, a blacke fellowe with longe haire, who saied hee knewe hee shoulde never bee taken, for hee had used that trade allmoste these twentie yeares'.[11] The only other mention of this pirate's activities on the Thames comes earlier in the same year, when a band led by a man dressed in a black cloth suit, who was known as 'Black Will', rowed downstream from Limehouse and plundered several vessels before getting ashore with their loot. Perhaps this was the same Black Will who was master's mate on an English pirate ship which captured a Portuguese carvel near Madeira in 1608 and whose share of the prize amounted to £335. The true identity of Black Will may never be known, but whoever he was he deserves to be numbered amongst the most successful pirates of his day.

Another Thameside pirate who enjoyed a career of some notoriety was 'Dick of Dover'. His real name was Richard Catro and he was a sailor from the Isle of Thanet. He was first ques-

tioned in the admiralty in 1613 in connection with several piracies, but at that time he strongly denied being known as Dick of Dover. He next appears in connection with piracy six years later, when he 'made a match' at the 'Three Tuns' in Ratcliffe to go down river in search of likely prizes. Catro and his men took a hoy as far as Tilbury, plundered the *Gift of God* of Calais of her cargo of cloth worth about £150, and finally returned to Ratcliffe with the booty laden in two wherries. Catro was arrested and arraigned as Dick of Dover. He was sentenced to death, but may have escaped, for the following year Dick of Dover was again at large, this time leading an attack on the *Primrose* at Long Reach and plundering two other vessels near Tilbury. Perhaps some pirates' nick-names were perennial.

Thameside pirates took pains to ensure that they could not be easily identified. They were helped by the long winter nights and by the river mists that formed on the Thames. Crews of ships often had little time to notice their assailants before being stowed unceremoniously below hatches. Lawrence Tatum, the master of the *James* of London, which was taken at Blackwall on a winter's night in 1624, described how a dozen or more men 'entred the said shippe in the darcke and presently masked and covered the faces of this examinant's men then aboard the said shippe [so] that they coulde not discerne them to take any notice of them.'[12]

Some pirates even went so far as to disguise themselves by wearing false beards or by blacking their faces with powder. Others wore masks or visors and one man actually boarded vessels wearing an iron helmet shaped like a skull. Even when identification was possible it was still difficult, because witnesses who had last seen their attackers wearing rough seamen's clothes might be asked to identify the same men when they were well dressed and groomed. Only the most foolish helped to incriminate themselves – like Arthur Halse, who appeared in court wearing the very stockings which formed part of the cargo he was accused of stealing.

The reader of the criminal records that deal with piracy on the Thames is left with the impression that many witnesses refused to come forward or tell the truth because they were frightened of

the consequences. It is hard to believe, for example, that a pirate such as Black Will could have made a living from piracy for twenty years without a lot of people knowing about it. From what little is known of him, Black Will was probably a man who would have known how to deal with informers. Pressed for the whereabouts of Will and his men, the most information that one witness would volunteer was that they 'did usuallie hitte one an other in the teeth with theire whoores about Ratcliffe, Shadwell and Southwarcke', and that was as much as he said he knew.[13] In some cases intimidation of witnesses was quite blatant. George Kirby, one of the crew of the *Judith* of Rochester, which was spoiled by Thameside pirates, went to the Marshalsea Prison in order to identify one of his attackers. Judging by the pirate's appearance this cannot have been too difficult, for he was described as:

> ... a little shorte man with flaxen haire on his head and a yellowe bearde and hath a cutt over his righte cheeke and hath a longe tall woman in a red wascoate to his wiefe ... and he was called by the rest of his consorts by the name of Blue Bearde.[14]

Kirby made a positive identification, but at no small risk to himself, for while he was at the prison Blue Beard attacked him and swore that if he ever got out he would chop him into little pieces.

Intimidation may not always have been necessary. Many of the people of the East End were solidly behind the pirates. When Black Will's name came to the attention of the admiralty in 1620 he was reported to have fled the city, but there were said to be at least a hundred of his followers waiting to join him.

If wanted men did not wish to leave London altogether, they could retire for a time to the anonymity of the riverside settlements, or else lie low at the houses of friends or accomplices until the hue and cry had died down. Word spread swiftly whenever a search was being made for 'seafaring men' and the Londoners not only hid the pirates but openly helped them to make good their escape. For example, when John Skelton was arrested by one of the king's messengers in Ratcliffe, a hostile crowd soon formed and helped him escape. Skelton sought

refuge in the house of a certain Richard Cornish, but the messenger found him and showed Cornish an admiralty warrant for the pirate's arrest, together with letters of assistance from the Privy Council. Cornish, however, was unimpressed by all this paper and told the messenger that 'hee cared neither for him . . . nor his badge . . . and further asked the saied Skelton yf hee would bee rescued awaie and Skelton said yea'.[15]

Skelton was later captured and sentenced to death, but he must have been a very popular man, for a collection to save his life was taken among the maritime population (presumably to raise money for a composition), and he was actually allowed out of prison to help drum up money! Inevitably he absconded, and when last seen he was on Tower Hill, 'goinge on a rounde pace'.[16]

One of the main purposes of executing pirates in London was to discourage Londoners from such open collaboration. The gallows were situated on the banks of the river at Wapping, on a site known as Execution Dock (close to where 'The Town of Ramsgate' public house now stands). The choice of site was excellent, since Wapping was inhabited mainly by seafarers and watermen on whom the lesson would not be lost. Many of the pirates who trod the gallows had committed their offences on the Thames, and not a few had actually planned their crimes in Wapping itself. The whole business of executions was carefully stage-managed; designed to inspire fear and awe in the populace at large and to serve as a cautionary tale for others. A hanging at Wapping must have been just as popular a public spectacle as an execution at Tyburn, perhaps more so, since Wapping held a greater capacity audience. Spectators who could not see from the land could get aboard ships and even climb the masts or rigging to get a better view. At an execution which took place in 1604, one observer was watching from a ship anchored on the opposite side of the river.

Such performances were rarely accorded to individuals. Usually several men suffered together, following their conviction at an admiralty sessions. In the early seventeenth century most offenders were imprisoned on the south bank of the river in the Marshalsea Prison, and it was from here that they were led to their deaths. The grim procession wound its way over London

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Bridge, through the city streets and along the north bank to the place of execution. At its head walked an officer carrying a silver oar, symbol of the authority of the High Court of Admiralty. The pirates were hanged at low water mark (emphasising the fact that the execution was taking place within the lord admiral's jurisdiction), and their bodies were left until the river had flowed over their heads three times.

Gruesome as they were, these spectacles do not seem to have been very effective in dissuading the population from supporting piracy. One of the main problems in controlling Thameside piracy was that stolen goods could easily be disposed of on the London markets or, if this was too risky, they could be stored for a while or even sent overseas for sale. Between 1603 and 1640 only seventeen people were indicted for harbouring pirates or receiving stolen goods from them, and this despite the fact that the names of many more offenders were known. Seven of these seventeen were women and there can be little doubt that females played an important part in disposing of booty. The main obstacle to securing a conviction was that of proving that receivers had known goods to have been stolen. Amongst the cargo of the *Elephant* of Flushing, taken at Leigh in 1615, were bales of silk worth £450 and three chests containing gold chains and silver and pearl spoons valued at £200. The admiralty drew up a list of receivers in connection with this crime, but none of them was ever indicted, presumably through lack of evidence. Even when accessories were brought to court, juries were reluctant to convict them. William Van Dongen, a perfumier of the Strand, was cleared of receiving a pound of musk taken from the *Bonadventure* of Dieppe, plundered at Erith in 1619, and Giles Pensfoot, a St Katherine's goldsmith, was acquitted on two charges of receiving silver plate from the *Magdalane* of Dieppe and the *Blessing* of Sandwich, both of which were spoiled on the river in 1633. In 1634, five accessories were indicted following the piracy on the *Fortune* of Queenborough at Erith, but again all five were found not guilty.

Thus, riverside piracy continued unabated throughout the first half of the seventeenth century. The forces of law and order were quite unprepared to deal with the increase in crime which

was brought about by the rapid growth of London at this time. Indeed crimes on the river continued to pose a real threat to shipping long after English piracy on the seas and oceans had entered a decline. Ships passing down the Thames or anchoring in the docks to the east of the city were, in a sense, running a gauntlet through the lawlessness, deprivation and poverty which had grown up on both sides of the river as a result of London's haphazard eastward expansion.

These attacks on shipping were particularly embarrassing for the government, especially since foreign merchants were amongst the major sufferers. To give one individual example, Rombolt Jacobs, a Dutch Merchant Stranger, lost two boxes of musk worth £300 when the *Bonadventure* of Dieppe was looted by pirates in 1620, and he suffered further losses four years later when cloth, silks and taffeta belonging to him were carried off from the *James* of London while she was lying at Blackwall. Even the personal possessions of the aristocracy were not immune. In 1637, the *James* of Dover was boarded at Limehouse by a band of pirates, who carried off, amongst other items, an amber cabinet and some fine silver plate belonging to Thomas, Earl of Arundel.

There was no immediate solution to the problem. Only dramatic changes in the social and economic conditions prevailing in London and a vast improvement in crime prevention would bring about a decrease in crime on the river. It is ironic, although not perhaps entirely unexpected, that piracy should have continued so long on one of the busiest stretches of water in the world, under the very nose of the government and the admiralty.

6

Last Days of the Land Pirates

I do not look to see England or France
free of pirates.
– Lord Admiral Nottingham

At the beginning of the seventeenth century the English had a
reputation for piracy – a reputation which was not confined to
seamen. In foreign eyes, the whole population was sympathetic
towards piracy and many, though they never went to sea them-
selves, were actively supporting pirates by supplying their needs
and purchasing their booty. These land-bound accomplices were
often referred to by contemporaries as 'land pirates'. During the
first decade of the century the support which pirates received in
Britain reached such scandalous proportions that the govern-
ment was forced to act. Pirates and their helpers retreated west-
wards into the remotest corners of Britain and gradually order
was created out of chaos. The government assumed responsi-
bility and finally even the people themselves began to regard
piracy as being essentially an evil practice. By 1640 land piracy
in Britain on a grand scale was a thing of the past.

When James succeeded to the English throne in 1603, it must
have seemed unlikely that his subjects would ever be cured of
their piratical inclinations. The willingness with which the
coastal inhabitants entertained pirates, bought their loot, sup-
plied their needs and even financed their depredations, cut
completely across the social strata and involved everyone from
the humblest fisherman to the most powerful magnate.

There was a serious discrepancy between the gravity of the
crime of piracy and the attitudes of accessories. Many of those
who purchased or received pirate loot probably did not regard
their actions as criminal. To them, pirates appeared in the role of
benefactors who provided a welcome source of cut-price goods,
including luxuries such as silks, sugar and spices which they

would otherwise have been unable to afford. How those goods had been acquired was not their concern; better not to know at all. What was clear was that the pirates were English – often local men – and the goods they had for sale had probably been plundered from foreigners, Catholics more likely than not. People felt there was a kind of justice in that. In this sense, receiving pirate goods was the equivalent of smuggling in the eighteenth century, or evading tax today. It was a technical crime which was difficult for the government to counter because it went against most people's interests.

Throughout the seventeenth century many of those who aided and abetted pirates were able to escape justice because of certain anomalies in the piracy laws. First, an important statute of 1536 'for punysshement of Pyrotes and Robbers of the See' made no mention of accessories at all,[1] and second, accessories (and this applied to crimes other than piracy), could not be tried until the principals to their crimes had been convicted. Thus the common law courts could not try accessories to piracy because the principals to their crimes were triable in the admiralty courts; but the admiralty courts could not try them either because their crimes had been committed on land, outside the admiralty's jurisdiction, and the act of 1536 had not given the admiralty special jurisdiction in the case of accessories. Therefore the amazing situation existed whereby no court in England was legally entitled to try accessories to piracy – a situation which persisted until the law was changed in 1700.

In practice, accessories did not escape so easily, because the admiralty took upon itself the task of trying them. However, it was still necessary for the principals to their crimes to have been convicted first. If the pirate or pirates in question died, refused to plead, were pardoned, acquitted, or were simply never brought to trial, then there was no way in which those who had aided and abetted them could be tried and punished.

There were scarcely any effective sanctions to prevent the coastal population from openly supporting pirates and trafficking with them in the early years of James's reign. All along the Channel coast, particularly from the Isle of Wight westwards, an enthusiastic welcome awaited successful freebooters. The dis-

posal of the cargo from just one captured vessel, the *Jonas* of Emden, provides an interesting case, because so many persons of rank and importance in the South West were involved.

Early in 1605 the *Jonas*, with her cargo of cottons, lawns, says and cambrics worth some £10,000, was riding under the protection of Cowes Castle. Nearby were anchored two vessels. The first, captained by her owner John Muckill, a gentleman of London, was the *Mary Catherine* of Southampton, 50 tons. She was manned by thirty-four Englishmen and a handful of Dutch, and carried Dutch letters of marque. The second vessel was the *Lewen* of Holland, captained by Andreas Franson, which was blockading a Spanish Dunkirker that had taken refuge in Portsmouth.

Muckill and Franson, unable to resist the temptation of such a rich prize as the *Jonas*, made a pact to capture her, even though she was Dutch. On the night of 20 January, Muckill and a band of sixteen men rowed alongside the *Jonas* in a longboat and took possession of her while most of her crew were on shore. He then carried his prize to Portsmouth where he and Franson split up the goods between them, Muckill keeping the ship.

The pirates now had the problem of disposing of the cargo of the *Jonas*. Sailing westwards, they anchored at Cawsand Bay and opened up their prize for trade. People flocked from nearby Plymouth to barter with them, without any action being taken by the authorities, which was hardly surprising, since Muckill had bribed Nicholas Cheeke, the searcher of Plymouth, to countenance the illegal trade. Muckill's next port of call was Helford, where he bribed Francis Vivian, son of the vice-admiral of Cornwall, and once again set up shop. Many of the pirates travelled overland to Penryn, where they were able to dispose of still more of their booty. Once the possibilities for trade in southern Cornwall had been exhausted, Muckill sailed to the Scilly Isles, where he was warmly received by the captain of the islands, John Godolphin. He presented Godolphin with a gilt clock worth £200 and at least £30 in cash (some reports said as much as £300). The pirates were becalmed in the Scillies for a pleasant three weeks, during which time they traded with the islanders while their captain was entertained at Godolphin's

table. Godolphin also victualled the pirates' ship and provided them with gunpowder and a new mainsail. Finally, the pirates took their leave and sailed to Morocco, where they were able to dispose of the remnants of the *Jonas*'s cargo.

The main reason why the coastal population of England was able to trade and fraternise so openly with pirates was the attitude of the local admiralty officers, who were mainly entrusted with the task of apprehending pirates and those who assisted them. The chief admiralty officers in the maritime counties were the vice-admirals of the coast. They were appointed by the lord high admiral and usually received their office as a gift or a personal favour, or else purchased it in the hope of making it a profitable concern. Their responsibilities included carrying out the instructions of the Privy Council and the admiralty, and implementing the king's proclamations on maritime affairs.

The vice-admirals not only proved to be inept at curbing the piratical inclinations of the coastal inhabitants; many were similarly inclined themselves. The extent of admiralty corruption was outstanding, even in an age in which a certain degree of financial dishonesty was an acceptable concomitant of most official posts. The appointment of vice-admirals, which was usually for life, bore no relation either to their integrity or to their ability. It is hardly surprising therefore that their main concern in dealing with pirates and their accessories was to squeeze as much money or booty from them as possible. Vice-admirals or their underlings frequently went aboard pirate ships in attempts (so they claimed) to persuade the pirates to surrender or to restore their loot. Despite taking such daring risks no admiralty officers ever appear to have been harmed by the pirates or even to have been threatened by them. The truth of the matter was that many admiralty men were on first-name terms with pirates.

The lord admiral had the right to all pirate booty, but as a perquisite of their office, the vice-admirals were entitled to keep half. It was clearly in their interests to keep quiet about any pirate loot which fell into their hands, thus depriving the lord admiral of his rightful share. This was almost certainly a further

reason why the vice-admirals were so unwilling to take legal proceedings against pirates and their aiders and abettors. A trial meant publicity, and it would soon have become clear who had received gifts from the pirates. Thus, the vice-admirals were feathering their own nests at the lord admiral's expense, and helping pirates and their accessories to escape justice.

That the failure to control piracy was due largely to a lack of integrity and central direction within the admiralty was recognised at the time. In May 1605, Sir Ferdinando Gorges, keeper of Plymouth Fort, wrote to the Earl of Salisbury informing him of the increase in piracy and suggesting that it 'might easily be prevented if authority were given to any that knew what to do and would be careful of their duties and licensed to exercise their best means for prevention thereof'.[2] Only the previous year the lord admiral himself had bemoaned the spread of piracy, and expressed the wish that 'the King's officers and mine would join together to do their best, and that is the true way to cut them off'.

Yet attempts to combat the increase in piracy were likely to be unsuccessful as long as the admiralty remained in the hands of Charles Howard, Earl of Nottingham. He was a national hero who was able to enjoy his prolonged old age basking in the reflected glory of the defeat of the Spanish Armada. He had been the titular commander of the English fleet on that celebrated occasion, but that was in 1588. He was to remain as lord high admiral for another thirty years, until he was finally pensioned off in 1618 at the age of eighty-two.

In James's reign Nottingham became less and less involved in the day-to-day business of the admiralty. Rather, he used his position as a means of acquiring easy money through the sale of offices and privileges. He was, therefore, hardly the most suitable person to appoint vice-admirals or to keep their avaricious tendencies in check. After 1607 he did not even have a financial interest in suppressing piracy, for by that year he had farmed his droit in pirate booty to Humphrey Jobson, one of his secretaries, for an undisclosed sum. Thus, at the centre of a corrupt admiralty system, there was an ageing and incompetent lord admiral who was either incapable of controlling his own appointees, or

who was not interested enough in the detail of admiralty business to try to do so.

Given the state of the admiralty, it was inevitable that local officers and dignitaries in the south west would re-establish the kind of personal domains founded on the traffic in pirate goods that had once flourished under Elizabeth. These domains had fallen into decay in the latter years of Elizabeth's reign, partly because the war had concentrated naval forces on the south west and had provided, in privateering, a legitimate alternative to piracy, and partly because of a decline in the personal fortunes of those who were involved in piracy – the Killigrews in Cornwall, the Perrots in South Wales, and the Rogers in Dorset.

After peace with Spain, the way was once again open for powerful local magnates and unscrupulous admiralty officers to resurrect this profitable business. The framework was already there. During wartime the south west had come to rely heavily on the profits from privateering. Every privateer which had been sent to sea had needed to be armed and victualled, and had, therefore, needed financing. There were already in existence entrepreneurs and suppliers whose business interests revolved around sending warlike ships to sea, and who were bound to suffer once privateering ended. These men, finding no compensatory increase in peacetime trade, naturally turned their attentions towards financing piratical voyages. In 1607, the Spanish ambassador complained that there were many merchants in England who did no other business than to equip pirates and purchase their captures. One example of such a merchant was William Swinsbury of Plymouth, who victualled Thomas Pin's ship, the *Grace*, which left Cawsand Bay in 1604 and plundered a rich French vessel off the Scilly Isles.

This illegal business was greatly facilitated during the early years of James's reign by the continuance of the war between Holland and Spain. The English, naturally sympathetic to the Dutch cause, began to arm and equip Dutch privateers in growing numbers, once they were no longer able to send their own ships to sea. Many of these Dutch privateers were nothing but thinly-disguised English pirate vessels. They were fitted out in England and manned, for the most part, by English seamen.

Their only concession to legality was that they carried Dutch letters of marque (which were freely obtainable) and a few Dutch crew members. One ship actually carried a single Dutchman whose job it was to pose as captain while the vessel was in English ports.

The Government was well aware of the way in which the proclamation of 1603, which was meant to end privateering once and for all, was being flouted. Consequently, two further proclamations were issued in 1605 which forbade British subjects to finance, equip or serve in the privateers of any other nation, and in particular those of Holland. However, the sympathies of the English and the complicity of port officers made the proclamations impossible to enforce, and in 1607 the problem was as great as ever, for the Earl of Salisbury remarked that 'the continual practice of the English with the Hollanders is so visible as the whole nation grows scandalous by it'.[3]

The man whose name was most frequently connected with pirates and their accomplices at this time was Sir Richard Hawkins, who was vice-admiral of Devon from 1603 to 1610 (except for a brief period of suspension between August 1606 and April 1607). Because of his hatred of Spain, Hawkins was totally unsuited to be vice-admiral of one of the most strategic parts of the English coast. His sympathies were certain to lie with the English and Dutch pirates and privateers, particularly when their depredations were directed against Spain.

Sir Richard was the only son of the Elizabethan sea hero Sir John Hawkins and was himself a product of the Elizabethan war against Spain. On the outbreak of war in 1585 he had gone as a captain with Drake to the West Indies. He had been captain of a ship in the fleet which defeated the Armada, and in 1590 had sailed as captain of a ship in his father's expedition to Portugal. In 1593 he was captured by the Spanish while on a voyage of plunder in the South Seas, and had spent the rest of the war in Spanish prisons. Sir Richard never forgave the Spaniards for his long years in captivity, and when peace finally came, he begged the commissioners for the peace to allow him to seek remedy for his sufferings 'as the law of God and nations alloweth'.[4]

Hawkins was therefore a man with a grudge, for whom the

abolition of privateering represented a personal defeat, for it denied him the chance of continuing his private vendetta against the Spanish.

During his years as vice-admiral of Devon, it would be no exaggeration to say that Hawkins had dealings with almost every pirate of note who set foot in the west country. His main offence was to use his office to pervert the course of justice and to enrich himself financially. Pirates who fell into his hands were rarely sent for trial. Hawkins simply took their loot and released them, or sold them 'discharges' for their crimes, which were issued by virtue of his office as vice-admiral. Sometimes blank discharges were sold so that the pirates' names could be filled in at a later date. For example, after Hawkins had received £40 for a discharge from a pirate named John Payne, he also 'had an other discharge readie written with a blancke to put in the name of such as should be compounded withall'. Discharges were easily obtainable in Devon as long as Hawkins continued as vice-admiral. The form of a typical discharge, issued on 1 April 1606 to a pirate named Edward Follet, who had committed spoils in the Mediterranean, reads as follows:

> . . . I Sir Richard Hawkins for the considerations within specified doe release unto the within named Edward Follet all Clayme interest and title, which I may have or now have unto the goods or chattells or any other forfeitures, by reason of the offences of depredation or other offences committed by him, as Vice-admirall of the County of Devon; I doe acquite the said Edward Follet. And in witnes hereof I have hereunto sett my hand and seale the first of Aprill 1606. Richard Hawkins.

Hawkins may have thought that the sale of discharges was justified by the debt he imagined the Spanish owed him, but many of his dealings were with pirates who had plundered shipping of other nations. Indeed, on one occasion Hawkins received goods from pirates which turned out to belong to the Venetian ambassador in England. The ambassador had consigned his personal possessions to the *St Paul* of Toulon to be carried to England, but she had been taken off Sicily in August 1603 by English pirates. Returning home with their loot, some of these

pirates had been apprehended by Hawkins, who then brought their boat (containing many rich gowns and tapestries belonging to the ambassador) to a quay behind his house, where the goods were unloaded into a warehouse. Hawkins kept the pirates' boat and much of their loot and received £40 from one of their number, Edward Fall, a noted pirate, in return for a promise to free Fall 'from further troubles for that cause'.[5]

It was not long before the activities of the vice-admiral of Devon aroused strong complaints from several of the foreign ambassadors in London. The Venetian ambassador accused Sir Richard of receiving booty from the *St Paul*; the French ambassador alleged that Hawkins had released pirates who had plundered a French vessel, and in April 1605 the Spanish ambassador (who had a multitude of specific complaints), demanded a commission of inquiry into all Spanish prizes which had been brought to Devon in the two years since the peace.

The cumulative effect of these accusations finally forced the lord admiral to take action. In 1606 a commission was drawn up authorising Humphrey Jobson, one of Nottingham's secretaries, to investigate the affairs of the vice-admiral of Devon. Jobson's inquiries received a cool welcome in Plymouth – on one occasion he actually crossed swords with one of Hawkins's servants, and his relations with the vice-admiral were so bad that Hawkins had him thrown into prison. Even while the investigation was in progress Hawkins trafficked with a pirate vessel anchored at Salcombe and released some of the local inhabitants who had been trading with the pirates.

It was hardly likely that Jobson's findings would be favourable to the vice-admiral. Nottingham, as Hawkins's patron, had no desire to see him ousted from the vice-admiralty, but he could not afford to ignore his offences. On 12 August 1606, therefore, Hawkins was suspended from office and his duties assumed by James Bagg and Mr Harris, 'untyll such tyme as Sir Richard shall have purged himself of those fowle imputations'.[6] Nottingham followed this on 20 August by giving orders to investigate the allegations against Hawkins as thoroughly as possible, 'for the French doth offer to probe verry gret matters agaynst him'.[7] Somehow, Hawkins must have managed to 'purge himself', at

least temporarily, for in April 1607 the suspension was lifted and he was reinstated as vice-admiral.

Although Hawkins was the prime offender, his corruption was symptomatic of a wider malaise which affected admiralty officers throughout the whole of the south west in James's reign. The conduct of Hannibal Vivian and his son Francis in the vice-admiralty of South Cornwall left much to be desired. In 1606, Hannibal and his deputy at Fowey, John Rushley, allowed the pirate ship of John Downes to remain in harbour for several weeks, for which favour they received a pipe of wine, a chest of sugar and several bolts of Holland cloth. On another occasion, when a captured pirate was brought before Rushley, Rushley simply took a silver chain from him and let him go. Francis Vivian had not only traded with Muckill's band when they had put in at Helford; he had allowed them ashore to sell their wares, and had supplied them with gunpowder.

In 1607, Hannibal Vivian's tolerance of pirates landed him in trouble. In March he had travelled to Helford with fifteen men-at-arms and had arrested Captain John Jennings, Captain Roger Isaac and twenty of their men. He released all of his prisoners except for Jennings, whom he held until the pirates had collected a sizeable ransom, which of course he kept for himself. In November, Vivian was called to London to explain his conduct before the High Court of Admiralty. He was also asked to explain why his son had freed the pirate Robert Duncomb who had been arrested at Falmouth. Vivian's answers were not convincing on either count. Nottingham can hardly have been reassured about Vivian's conduct as vice-admiral, and yet he does not appear to have taken any further action against him.

The situation was little better elsewhere in the south west. In North Cornwall, William Restarrock, the vice-admiral, and John Bishop, his deputy at Padstow, had released some of Muckill's men in return for bribes. Further east, the Dorset coast, which had been a centre of piracy in Elizabeth's reign, was still buzzing with piratical activity. In 1607 Lord Bindon wrote to Salisbury to inform him that the townsfolk of Weymouth had boarded pirate ships and that pirates had been entertained in

Portland Castle, 'a very nursery accounted these many years for giving succour to all pirates'.[8] However, Bindon himself was not entirely innocent in the matter of receiving pirate booty. In 1606 he had arrested a Portuguese carvel which had been brought into Weymouth by pirates and had kept the ship and her cargo for himself. His action only came to light when four of the Portuguese crew reached London and a sentence of restitution was procured from the admiralty court. Bindon was extremely reluctant to restore the ship and only did so after the Spanish ambassador had complained to the King, and Salisbury had written advising him to give the Portuguese satisfaction.

Thus, in the early years of James's reign the whole of the south west coast was a hotbed of piracy and intrigue. In particular, the efforts of foreign owners and ambassadors to recover their lost goods were being almost openly frustrated by the willingness of admiralty officers to release pirates for bribes, and by the readiness with which most of the inhabitants traded with pirates – a traffic which was allowed to continue with little let or hindrance. Many men grew rich on this illegal trade. Richard Boniton, a cousin to the vice-admiral of Cornwall, was said to have done so well from trafficking with pirates that he 'might bee the better for all the daies of his life'.[9]

The admiralty could not hope to conceal the corruption that existed within its own ranks for long. By 1608 complaints were multiplying and direct representations were being made to James to intervene personally to halt the increase in piracy. Finally, on 21 May 1608, the Council directed Nottingham to issue general piracy commissions to ten leading citizens in each of the maritime counties, empowering them to investigate (without respect of persons) all matters relating to piracy that had occurred in the five years since 20 April 1603. The commissioners were instructed to arrest all offenders, confiscate all pirate booty and, in particular, to enquire:

> ... what Piratts and sea rovers his, or their recevors, aydors, comfoiters or abetters have bin apprehended and taken by any viceadmiralls or other inferior officers or other his majisties officers ministers Subjects; what agreements or Compositions have bin made with them or any their associatts and Company;

where and by whome and for what and how they or any of them
have bin released or sett at libertie.[10]

The commissioners were to present their findings to the
Council not later than Michaelmas Day (29 September) 1608.
The result of their investigations revealed great scandals and,
in the words of one of them, 'almost revolution'.[11] In December
1608, Francis Vivian, who had succeeded his father as vice-
admiral of South Cornwall, appeared in the admiralty court to
answer accusations which had been made concerning his deal-
ings with pirates. He defended himself as best he could, but
finally refused to answer further questions as he said it was
'against the rule of reason to accuse him selfe'.[12]

The corruption in the vice-admiralty of Devon was most
glaringly apparent. Hawkins had refused to co-operate with the
piracy commissioners, but a bill was preferred against him in
Star Chamber, charging him with receiving, aiding and comfort-
ing William Hull and other notorious pirates and taking bribes
to free them. He was tried in Star Chamber in May 1609 and
condemned 'by allmost a Jury of Judges'.[13] Early in 1610 he was
dismissed as vice-admiral, and on 30 January he wrote from
prison to Sir Julius Caesar begging his release and remission of
the fine which the court had imposed on him.

Matters did not stop with Hawkins's punishment. Following
the results of the piracy commissioners' investigations a special
commission was appointed under the great seal to hear all com-
plaints relating to piracy. Its members included a formidable
array of lords, ministers and judges. James himself took a keen
interest in the piracy investigations that were going on at this
time. On 25 June 1609, the Venetian ambassador reported
that:

> The King has been attending council daily not merely to put an
> end to the mischief wrought by the pirates but also to take steps
> to prevent them being supported by his ministers for the future.

On 20 July, the commission ordered the arrest of Hannibal
Vivian and William Restarrock, the two Cornish vice-admirals,
and others 'as well within exempte and privileged places as with-

out'.[14] By September no less than fifteen pirates and 150 aiders and abettors had been arrested and sent to London to appear before the Council and in December Lord Knollys was demanding that Vivian forfeit all his property for being a receiver of pirate booty.

The piracy investigations brought Nottingham's conduct as lord admiral under close scrutiny. Evidence was produced which showed that he had acquiesced in allowing captured pirates to buy their freedom. Particularly damaging was the fact that William Longcastle, a noted pirate, had given £50 to the lord admiral for a 'composition' (a deal whereby a captured pirate was set free in return for restoring his loot or making a cash settlement). The lord admiral tried to bluster his way out of a difficult situation by insisting that it was his right to arrange compositions – a claim which did little to enhance his reputation.

Nottingham's credibility was being further eroded at this time by a commission which had been established in 1608 to investigate abuses in the navy. The driving force behind this commission was Henry Howard, Earl of Northampton, who seems to have wanted to discredit his cousin the Earl of Nottingham, possibly for personal reasons. By mid 1609 Northampton had discovered 'endless abuses' in the admiralty.[15] Particularly embarrassing for Nottingham was Northampton's report on his examination of two pirate captains, John Jennings and James Harris. (Jennings was the pirate who had been captured by Hannibal Vivian and released for a ransom of £140.) Both pirates were able to testify to the corruption of admiralty officers and to the assistance and encouragement which pirates had received from Captain Williamson, commander of the king's ship on the Irish coast. Their revelations may not have implicated Nottingham directly, but they showed how low the standards of admiralty and naval officers had sunk under his administration. The level of corruption was well summed up by Harris, who believed that there was nothing that encouraged pirates more than 'the readines of Officers to discharge them upon takinge their Money'.[16] In December 1609 Northampton forwarded the pirates' examinations to Secretary Lake, adding that he feared that Nottingham would try to have them speedily executed,

'bycause they tell tales'.[17] Acting on this advice, the King granted the pirates a stay of execution 'in hope of farther confessions from them'.[18]

The exposure of affairs in the admiralty had gone so far by 1610 that Nottingham was forced to abandon any attempt to cover up for the offences of his officers. His only hope of saving his own skin lay in siding with the king and condemning those whose guilt had been proven. This he did in a letter to Salisbury written on 8 August. He was also able to play on the sentimental feeling which still attached to him as Elizabeth's old admiral. 'I trust', he wrote rather pathetically, 'the Balanse shall not be soo unequall as that I shall have cause to wysh that I had bene put into my grave when my old Mistress was.'

Therefore, by 1610 the illegal activities of the inhabitants of the south west had been subjected to the closest scrutiny, and measures had been taken to punish those guilty of encouraging piracy. The vice-admiral of Devon had been dismissed, fined and imprisoned, and it is unlikely that the vice-admirals of Cornwall went unpunished. Other influential men in the south west had been unable to escape the net cast by the piracy commissioners, and 150 offenders, accused of dealing with pirates, had been sent to London to appear before the Council. The whole conduct of admiralty affairs had been heavily criticised and Nottingham himself had only narrowly escaped public disgrace. That he was allowed to continue as lord admiral was due to his age, his prestige and the fact that he had been sadly unaware of much that had been going on in the admiralty. As one member of the 1610 parliament put it, 'much water passed by the mill, whereof the miller was ignorant'.[19]

Nevertheless, it was impossible to change the habits of the coastal population overnight. The trade in pirate goods had been going on for centuries and was practically second nature to many in the ports and villages of the south west. Yet the activity of the piracy commissioners between 1608 and 1610 and the disgrace and punishment of many prominent people did act as a very real deterrent. The moves against aiders and abettors of pirates also coincided with a truce between Holland and Spain, concluded in 1609, which greatly reduced the number of pirate

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ships and pseudo-privateers which had previously plagued the Channel coast. The local inhabitants of the south west were still willing to assist pirates and purchase their loot, but the chances of doing so were few and far between and the collusion of admiralty officers could no longer be depended upon.

As the screw tightened in England, so the focal point of the trade in pirate goods shifted to Ireland. Here, in the province of Munster, along one of the remotest stretches of the British coastline, pirates were still able to come and go at will. The local inhabitants were unruly and beyond the arm of effective government and, before 1614, the coast was only patrolled by a solitary naval pinnace, which left England every summer in a futile attempt to guard Irish waters.

It was not long before the parasites who had made a living from piracy in England, finding the opportunities for illicit trading severely restricted at home, followed their benefactors to Ireland. Many small boats slipped out from the harbours of Devon and Cornwall to supply the pirates of Munster with provisions and to purchase their loot. The disguises that these people used were many. Some pretended that they sailed to Ireland to fish, or to supply the fishermen at Crookhaven (a town close to the favourite haunts of the pirates); others that they went to help the infant colonies that had been established by the English. Many simply let it be known that they went to trade – which was at least close to the truth.

Such was the amount of commerce generated by piracy at this time that some Englishmen thought it worth while to settle in Ireland, and so facilitate their illicit business. In 1612 the Privy Council declared that the Irish coast was inhabited,

> . . . either by natives, who from motives of interest or of fear, are ready to supply their [the pirates'] necessities, or by persons of our own nation who have taken places there with the express purpose of commercing with the pirates with more convenience and security.[20]

Settling at such remote outposts as Baltimore, Bantry, Leamcon and Berehaven, the English temporarily forgot their detestation of Ireland as being a backward and barbarous country.

The conduct of the Irish admiralty officers had not gone un-

noticed in the general investigation into admiralty corruption. The vice-admiral of Munster from 1607–10 was none other than Nottingham's secretary, Humphrey Jobson, the very man who had led the enquiry into Hawkins's conduct as vice-admiral of Devon in 1606. His duties in Ireland were discharged for the most part by his brother Richard, who acted as vice-admiral in his absence. With the active collaboration of the Jobsons, the Munster coast had been virtually subjected to pirate rule. Both brothers had received vast quantities of stolen goods, and Richard had freed pirates and issued them with 'passports' (similar to Hawkins's discharges), to enable them to travel the countryside with greater security. Thickpenny, Jolliffe and Lumley, three pirate captains, had openly paraded in the streets of Youghal and Richard Jobson had not lifted a finger to stop them. He had even employed pirates on admiralty business and – the final indignity – pirates had sat as jurors at an admiralty court held on Sherkin Island.

By 1610, however, Humphrey Jobson was in Newgate and his brother had been brought over to England to answer questions in the admiralty court about his conduct as deputy vice-admiral. Soon after, Humphrey was dismissed from office for 'bad behaviour'.[21] Yet his dismissal did not have the same salutary effect as had Hawkins's dismissal in England. Ireland was too remote and the hold of the pirates too strong. Within the year Izon Kempe, Jobson's successor as vice-admiral of Munster, was in trouble with the Council when it was discovered that he and Richard Grice, his deputy, had boarded a pirate ship and 'maid merrie' with the rovers, and had received a gift of a boat laden with hides and lead.[22]

To prevent the inhabitants of the Munster coast giving assistance to pirates was a daunting task. In 1610, the Council of Munster even attempted to control the traffic by depopulating the islands and laying waste certain parts of the coast frequented by pirates. It is doubtful, however, whether even such desperate measures could have done much to discourage piracy in Ireland, because it had such a strong hold at the time, and guarding the coasts effectively was such a problem.

One man who was closely involved with the pirates during

James's reign was Sir William Hull, who lived at Leamcon, the pirates' main resort. Hull is a shadowy but compelling figure, who was certainly hand-in-glove with many of the leading pirates of the day. (It is interesting to speculate whether he is to be identified with William Hull, the pirate son of the mayor of Exeter, who went to sea as captain of a Topsham ship and plundered a French vessel in the Mediterranean in 1602. This man was released by Sir Richard Hawkins on his return to Devon and only escaped execution through the exertions and influence of his father.) In 1612 an attempt was made to end Hull's involvement with pirates by taking the fortification at Leamcon out of his hands and installing a garrison there. Still, such drastic measures seem to have had little effect in curbing Sir William's associations with pirates, for at the beginning of Charles I's reign, Edward Nicholas, the secretary for admiralty business, wrote to inform the lord deputy in Ireland that Hull (by then vice-admiral of Munster) was 'an encourager and countenancer of pirates. I hope to weary him of it.'[23]

Improved naval surveillance gradually made it more difficult for the coastal inhabitants in general to traffic with pirates. James's reign witnessed a gradual acceptance by the government of responsibility for patrolling the British coasts. Under Elizabeth, threats from pirates and requests for naval assistance had usually met with letters authorising her aggrieved or threatened subjects to send out ships themselves. Self-help was an important tenet of Elizabethan government and it fitted in nicely with the queen's restricted finances. James's financial problems were more serious than Elizabeth's, but he was willing to take the job of the regular policing of the seas out of the hands of private individuals. This change in attitude owed much to the acceptance of England's sovereignty over the seas around her coasts and to the government's desire to enforce this doctrine.

Not that every cry for help was answered by the despatch of a royal squadron. Nottingham responded to requests for assistance in much the same way as Elizabeth had – by issuing commissions empowering cities or individuals to equip their own ships for protective duties. Between 1610 and 1614, commissions to capture pirates were granted to Bristol, Exeter, Hull, New-

castle, Weymouth and Barnstaple, besides a joint commission for the Earl of Southampton and the Mayor of Portsmouth. However, after 1618, when the favourite George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, was appointed lord high admiral, the issue of such commissions virtually ceased. In 1623, when Weymouth applied for a commission to send out ships against pirates, Sir John Coke wrote a letter stating that such applications would no longer be regarded favourably, for:

> ... it standeth not with his Majesties' interest, nor honor, that anie other ships should gward his ports, or trade but his own: or that anie subjects should have power at their discretions, either to disturb the free intercourse of his allies: or to ingage the state by such disorders, as under color of pursuing pirats they may commit.[24]

Such proud words would have had to bow to practical necessity had they been spoken ten years earlier, for during the first half of James's reign the navy was totally inadequate to meet the threat from pirates. Although the King had always taken a lively interest in his navy and had spent at least as much on it as Elizabeth, it was money badly spent so long as Nottingham and Sir Robert Mansell (the treasurer of the navy) remained in charge of naval affairs. Under the direction of Nottingham and Mansell corruption and incompetence had proliferated to such a degree that the state of the navy had become a public scandal. In most years of the reign more money was spent on the navy than had been spent in the last years of the war, and yet there were fewer ships in service. Most vessels were, in any case, unsuited to the task of securing the coast against pirates. For this work fast, heavily-armed vessels of shallow draught were needed. Most ships in the navy were just the opposite – broad beamed, ornately decorated ships with lofty upper-works, which performed indifferently under sail. In the early years of James's reign the only ships of any merit for anti-pirate work were two pinnaces, the *Lion's Whelp* and the *Tremontane* – both of which did see some action against the pirates in Ireland.

It was the sad state of his navy which probably persuaded James to take advantage of a Dutch offer to patrol the western

coasts of Britain at a time when the threat from piracy was at its height. The Dutch made the offer because they had suffered heavy losses at the hands of English pirates, and because the pirates were sheltering in Irish harbours, where Dutch warships could not follow them. On 29 July 1611, James gave permission for the Hollanders to chase pirates into Irish harbours, and in the following month this was extended to include Welsh harbours too.

Apart from the indignity of permitting foreign warships to assume duties which should have been performed by the English navy, James always feared that the Dutch might abuse their privilege. He had emphasised that Dutch warships were only to pursue pirates into his harbours if their assistance was required by his own officers. There were soon signs that Holland was using the concession to harass the shipping of Spain and her allies. Worse, in 1614, the Dutch admiral, Moy Lambert, attacked a pirate vessel at Crookhaven. The pirate ship (which had already surrendered) was driven on shore by Lambert and the Dutch killed some of the local population, wounded an admiralty officer, and made off with £5,000 worth of the pirates' booty. Relations between England and Holland became strained after this incident, and the agreement by which the Dutch had patrolled the British coast was allowed to lapse.

After this, the English navy itself slowly began to assume responsibility for tackling the pirates. In fact, the Channel coast had always been comparatively well patrolled; it was the western reaches of Britain which had been sadly neglected. In 1609, the lord deputy of Ireland had bitterly complained that:

> It were to good purpose if some of those ships appointed to keep the narrow seas, did once or twice in the winter search the harbours for pirates upon this coast, and if they lost their labour by such a journey, the same often happens to them in the narrow seas.[25]

Gradually the western guard was strengthened. Sir William Monson, sent to the west coast in 1610 to punish some pirates, arrived at Bristol to find that the King's ship, the *Advantage*, was so 'unserviceable in men, victuals, sails, powder and all

things else, that it was impossible to fit her to sea'. Using his initiative, Monson commandeered a bark and went in pursuit of the pirates who were hiding on the Welsh coast. His mission was ill-equipped and fruitless, but four years later he and Sir Francis Howard sailed to Ireland with a strong naval squadron and were able to punish the inhabitants of Broadhaven for harbouring pirates. Monson's glowing account of the service he performed on this occasion, particularly in discouraging the Irish from assisting pirates, should not be taken too literally however. The following year, when pirates returned to Broadhaven, Michael Cormocht, the chief collaborator and the very man whom Monson claimed to have punished, was up to his old tricks again.

Towards the end of James's reign, naval patrols were becoming more regular and increasingly effective in deterring pirates from using the coast. Buckingham's appointment as lord high admiral in 1619, and the exertions of the navy commissioners from 1618 onwards, brought about a marked improvement in naval affairs. New ships designed on more modern lines were laid down in English dockyards – between 1618 and 1623 two new ships were built each year – and old vessels, many of which were of little effective use were gradually phased out of service. Effective coastal patrols were an important aspect of the changed administration. Sir Thomas Button, who was given the task of protecting the western coast and the Bristol Channel after 1614, received warm commendations for the way in which he performed his duty. In 1619 the Merchant Venturers of Bristol wrote to the Privy Council praising Button for freeing the Bristol Channel of pirates, and in 1623 the mayor of Bristol thanked him for his services and noted, in passing, that the Severn and the Irish Sea had been free of pirates for the past five years.

By the end of James's reign strong patrols were a regular feature of naval activity. In 1624 instructions were issued for three strong ships to guard the Irish coast, and in the last year of the reign, a total of ten ships were patrolling the English Channel, 'a larger force than had probably ever been employed before for merely protective duties'.[26]

Even with strong naval squadrons, protecting the British coasts was an endless task which taxed the resources of the Stuart navy. Captain Richard Plumleigh complained of the near-impossibility of guarding Ireland, Wales and the Severn ('above 400 leagues of water') with only two ships. Pirates could put in at remote parts of the coast and still expect to be made welcome. In 1631, Captain Downes and Robert Nutt, two pirates who led the navy a merry chase in the south west, were using Helford as a hideout. Downes was captured soon afterwards in the Isle of Man, but Nutt and his followers continued to plague the coast for two more years. North Wales was one of the places they could still visit with some degree of security. In 1631, Morgan, Nutt's lieutenant, brought a sixty-ton prize into Pwllheli laden with linen and wine and traded with the locals. Two years later, John Norman, another of Nutt's men, also received a warm welcome at Pwllheli and some of the townsfolk even helped him to plunder a ship in the harbour.

Yet by the 1620s and 1630s, the English were no longer the arch exponents of piracy. French and Spanish privateers ('Dunkirkers' and 'Biscayners') were becoming increasingly active in British waters, and a completely new menace appeared in the form of Turkish rovers from Algiers and Sallee. For the first time in living memory the English began to suffer more from piracy than to profit from it.

Although English pirates still made occasional fleeting visits to the British coasts, the inhabitants, even in remote areas, were no longer so able or so willing to welcome them as they had been at the start of the century. The kind of wholesale trafficking and widespread corruption which had characterised the south west of England and Ireland during the first half of James's reign had disappeared and was never to return.

7

English Piracy in Decline

> And, was it not strange, a few of these should
> command the seas. Notwithstanding the Maltese,
> the Pope, Florentines, Genoeses, French, Dutch
> and English, gallies and men of warre, they would
> rob before their faces, and even at their owne
> ports . . . .
> – Capt. John Smith, *The bad life and conditions of Pyrats*

English piracy continued to be a vigorous force throughout the
first two decades of the century, despite the fact that there was a
continual turnover in pirate crews. Some men died of disease or
through natural causes, while others left the trade or accepted
pardons from England or from foreign states. Others suffered
the consequences of their chosen way of life; some were lost at
sea, others were killed in battle or were captured and chained to
the oar, while a few were even eliminated by the due processes
of law. During this period English pirates are known to have
been executed in Spain, France, Denmark, Scotland, Ireland,
Portugal and Italy, besides those who were hanged in England.
Yet piracy continued to flourish and there was no shortage of
men willing to step into dead men's shoes.

Signs that English piracy was beginning to enter a decline
first began to appear about 1615. In that year the pirates were
thrown into a state of uncertainty and panic through the loss of
their base at Mamora, which had been captured by the Spanish
in the summer of 1614. There was, therefore, an unusually large
number of pirates seeking some safe place of refuge at this time.
Late in 1614 two English pirate ships surrendered to the grand
duke of Tuscany and it was reported that the crews of nine
similar vessels were equally anxious to follow suit. Henry Main-
waring and his followers were in Ireland in 1615 seeking a
pardon (which was formally granted in the following year), and

at the same time two other captains, Tucker and Barry, were also on the British coast for the same purpose.

There were also rumblings of discontent among English pirates who were ensconced in bases in North Africa, and whose freedom of operation was being increasingly subjected to Turkish and Moorish control. In 1615 a pirate named Fry fled Tunis in a stolen vessel with eighty British followers, forty or fifty of whom were master gunners, and in subsequent years all but the most hardened renegades followed their example. James Haggerston, who had been a corsair captain at Algiers, was in London by 1617, and Robert Walsingham, who had also captained Turkish warships, escaped from the Turks and surrendered in Ireland with his men in 1618. By the time the English navy blockaded Algiers in 1621, there were few English renegades left in the city.

It was not too difficult for pirates to find some place of refuge, particularly in Italy, where several states were only too willing to pardon them in return for the wealth and strength that it was hoped they would bring with them. One man, who called himself the Viscount de Lormes, took advantage of this situation to pass himself off as the sole representative of a large band of pirates who wished to retire because they feared that their business was drying up. In order to make the prospect of pardoning this apocryphal band all the more attractive, he embellished his story with incredible details of their riches and possessions. He was eventually recognised for a rogue and a charlatan, but for five years, between 1617 and 1622, he succeeded in interesting Venice, Tuscany, France and even England in his proposition. He was probably taken seriously for so long because it was known that pirates were actively seeking to leave their profession in large numbers during these years.

The English pirates' fear that their trade would cease was over-pessimistic, but there were certainly good reasons for them to believe that their position was being undermined. Quite apart from the loss of their major base and their estrangement from Turkish ports, they were threatened at sea by naval forces on the one hand, and by competition from foreign rovers on the other.

The initial success which the pirates had enjoyed had been facilitated by the fact that European naval forces were generally unprepared to meet their challenge. The English navy, which should have been amongst the strongest in Europe, was shackled by financial and administrative incompetence at home; the French navy, which had been sadly neglected during the wars of religion, was scarcely a force to be reckoned with, while Spain's royal galleons (which were hardly suited to hunting swift and elusive pirate vessels) were mainly occupied with jealously guarding their country's own trade with the New World. This meant that seaborne traffic – which had been rapidly increasing in number and value – was particularly vulnerable in the early years of the seventeenth century. Only the Dutch, who sent out several squadrons of men-of-war to patrol the seas, can be said to have made any sustained effort against pirates.

Gradually, however, as it became clear that piracy would pose a more permanent threat than was at first apparent, governments began to consider more effective ways to tackle the problem. In England, for example, the growing number of depredations and the mounting pressure of mercantile complaints had helped to make the government more sensible of its responsibility for securing trade and commerce. After 1616, the practice of issuing commissions to private individuals to capture pirates was discontinued, and the full burden of patrolling the seas fell on the navy – indeed, it was seen as a matter of national pride that none but the king's ships should be entrusted with the protection of his own ports and trade.

While Nottingham was lord admiral, commissions were issued authorising port towns to equip vessels to meet some temporary threat from pirates, and similar commissions were also given to the owners and masters of ships trading in distant and dangerous seas. The first of such commissions was issued in December 1609 in response to a petition from English merchants who had suffered heavily at the hands of pirates in the Mediterranean. Between 1609 and 1618 at least thirty-two commissions were issued, nineteen of which were for ships trading overseas. There was always the risk that the gamekeeper might turn poacher, as

happened in the case of Henry Mainwaring, whose ship, the *Nightingale* of Chichester, had a commission to capture pirates. After Buckingham became lord admiral, there was a marked reluctance to issue commissions either to towns or to individuals.

Furthermore, pirates frequenting the British coast could no longer expect the same kind of welcome which they had enjoyed in the early years of the century. Vigorous measures, particularly aimed at dissuading those in positions of trust from encouraging piracy, had at least had some remedial effect. Certainly the danger from piracy was not considered to be as great by the end of James's reign as it had been at the beginning. In 1623, when an objection was raised to constructing a lighthouse on the Lizard on the grounds that it would serve to conduct pirates to the coast, Sir William Monson replied that such an objection was out of keeping with the times, for 'we have experience that since there hath been a course taken to punish such men as connived with them, and justice done upon the persons of pirates when they were taken, the coast hath not been infested with them as in times past'.[1]

Action was also being taken to safeguard shipping from attacks by pirates in more distant waters. The 'silly and innocent fishermen',[2] who had long provided easy pickings for pirates, were amongst the first to profit from naval protection. In 1615, King James gave orders for two small ships to accompany the east coast fishing fleet into Icelandic waters, 'to waster and defend them from pyrattes for five monethes' at a cost of £1,300.[3] Guard ships also helped to make fishing on the Newfoundland Banks a less hazardous occupation. During the first two decades of the century, pirates had been able to take men and provisions almost at will, but in 1620 John Mason, the governor of the colony, fitted out the *Peter and Andrew*, 320 tons, to protect the fishermen. In the following year two English men-of-war were patrolling the Banks, and in 1623 two warships were again in the area.

At a time when piracy was becoming a more hazardous profession, the English rovers, who had long posed the major threat to shipping, were beginning to be overshadowed by pirates of other nations. The adoption of northern European

sailing vessels and navigational techniques by christian and Turkish corsairs operating in the Mediterranean had soon eroded the privileged position which the English had enjoyed there at the turn of the century. By 1615 the Turks and Moors were beginning to make their presence felt in the Atlantic. In that year they ravaged the northern coast of Spain, sacking villages and carrying off many captives in an operation that was an ominous portent of things to come. Soon Turkish corsairs were sailing to British, Icelandic and American waters in search of plunder – stretches of ocean where English pirates had traditionally enjoyed a virtual monopoly.

Mounting activity by the Turks had the effect of making life more difficult for pirates of all nations, for it made governments more determined to take action to suppress piracy. To the seventeenth-century mind, the prospect of infidels carrying christians into bestial captivity in North Africa gave efforts to eradicate piracy an urgency and a crusading zeal which they had previously lacked. In a Europe strongly divided by political and religious differences, the one objective on which all christian nations were agreed was the desirability of crushing the Turkish pirates. A small French force combined with a Spanish fleet to attack Tunis in 1609, a Dutch fleet sailed against the Algerine pirates in 1619, and in 1620 an English expedition was also sent against Algiers – with the full encouragement and support of the Spaniards.

Thus, the seas and oceans of the world were becoming more dangerous for pirates with no safe place of refuge, and piracy itself was developing into a more competitive occupation. Northern European sailing ships were no longer the most effective pirate vessels, and in the 1620s and 1630s they were superseded by wonderfully swift vessels from Sallee and other ports which specialised in privateering and piracy. Piracy still retained a certain attraction for English seamen, but their desire for plunder and pillage had been somewhat lessened by twenty years of peaceful coexistence with all nations. The opportunities for joining a pirate crew had also diminished as the trade had contracted. The comparatively small number of English pirates who remained at sea were forced to make fleeting visits to remote

coastal areas where they could still expect to find a sympathetic welcome – a sorry contrast to the days when they had roamed the seas in large numbers and controlled whole stretches of coastline. Therefore, by the 1620s the character of piracy had changed dramatically and the English had ceased to be a particularly dominant or disruptive force.

*   *   *

The importance of this phase in the history of piracy cannot be measured in quantitative terms, since there are no figures which give any reliable indication of the number and value of the ships which were destroyed or captured. Injured parties and various other commentators were, of course, only too willing to conjure up sums which they claimed to be a true reflection of the losses which had been sustained. Such calculations were invariably little better than ill-informed guesswork, and could often be extremely misleading. For example, Gondomar, the Spanish ambassador to England, accused Henry Mainwaring of having robbed the Spanish of a million crowns while he was a pirate – a large enough sum perhaps, but not when it is compared with a report that Robert Walsingham (one of Mainwaring's captains) had done half as much damage in only six weeks! All that can be said with any certainty is that English pirates took many fine prizes whose individual value often amounted to several thousand pounds, and that they were the subject of frequent complaints by merchants of most nations.

In the final event, however, the influence which English pirates had on the development of piracy was of greater significance than the damage they caused to shipping. In the early seventeenth century, piracy began, for the first time, to present a more menacing aspect. The Jacobean rovers were stronger, more independent, better equipped and better organised than their Elizabethan predecessors. They had worked in association with Turks, Moors, Dutch and French rovers, and had thereby acquired something of the cosmopolitan character which was to continue to be one of the hall-marks of piracy. Savagery and bloodthirstiness (qualities long associated with pirates) became even more common owing to the frequent use of cannon and

firearms, and also because the pirates themselves were becoming increasingly estranged from 'civilised' communities. Piracy was in fact undergoing a transformation from being a national industry to becoming an international threat. As Derrick Hurd has observed: 'In James's reign piracy took an important step towards the traditional and romantic concept of piracy which is usually based on that of the eighteenth century.'[4]

Changes in the internal organisation of pirate bands at this time further anticipated later developments. In particular, the pirates working Atlantic waters displayed a remarkable degree of order and unity of purpose – qualities which had hitherto not been associated with men of their calling. Their cohesion derived in part from a common hatred of the Spanish and from a general (though by no means universal) sympathy towards their fellow countrymen, which often resulted in preferential treatment being given to British shipping. Exiles from their own country, this group of pirates rapidly established a loose hierarchy amongst themselves, acknowledged an overall leader, and even elected their own officers. They frequently united to face a common enemy and it was not unusual for ships to sail in consortship, or for captains to render practical assistance to one another. In these favourable conditions, the first tentative steps were taken towards the formation of an independent pirate community such as was later to develop in the West Indies, and indeed, it is possible to detect the beginnings of a formal code for the division of booty and for the punishment of those who did not abide by the rules of the community.

The part played by renegades (Dutch as well as English) in reconstituting the fleets of Barbary was widely recognised at the time. When the English rovers had first arrived in North Africa they had found only galleys and small Mediterranean sailing craft. Their own ships and their knowledge of navigation and artillery had been infinitely superior to that of either the Turks or the Moors (who had been only too willing to allow them use of their ports in order to learn from them). Within the space of a few years, several of the ports of Barbary could boast strong fleets of sailing ships. Armed with new vessels and new technology, the Turkish corsairs were able to inflict far greater,

damage on christian shipping than they had done previously. The seaworthiness of their new ships enabled them to keep the seas all the year round and, thanks to the help of foreign renegades, they soon grew so expert that they were able to extend their operations well into the Atlantic.

In retrospect it was indeed strange that English piracy should have remained a vigorous force for as long as it did; that a few thousand men should have continued to harass and plunder the shipping of Europe for almost twenty years. Their success was a foretaste of the strength which might be mustered by pirates as long as no concerted action was taken against them. Through long years of uninterrupted success, piracy became a more sophisticated profession, whose skills and techniques were to be copied in places where piracy was still only in germination. Under the guidance of English rovers the first change was made towards the romantic concept of piracy which was to grow to maturity during the following century. In their own day, the Jacobean pirates enlivened an age in which English naval achievements were distinguished by their mediocrity. It is ironic that it should have been pirates rather than regular forces who kept the flag of English seamanship flying at a time when their country's maritime fortunes had entered an inglorious phase.

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The following abbreviations have been used:

APC	*Acts of the Privy Council of England*
BM	British Museum
Barker	Barker, A., *A True and Certaine Report of the Beginning, Proceedings, Overthrowes, and now present Estate Of Captaine Ward and Danseker, the two late famous Pirates: from their first setting foorth to this present time* (1609)
CSP Dom	Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series
CSP Ir	Calendar of State Papers, Ireland
CSP Ven	Calendar of State Papers, Venetian
HCA	High Court of Admiralty Records, Public Record Office, London
HMC	*Historical Manuscripts Commission*
LPSP	Lambeth Palace, State Papers
Mainwaring	Manwaring, G. E., and Perrin, W. G. (eds), *The Life and Works of Sir Henry Mainwaring* (Navy Records Society, 2 vols, 1920–1)
Monson	Oppenheim, M. (ed), *The Naval Tracts of Sir William Monson* (Navy Records Society, 5 vols, 1902–14)
SP	State Papers in the Public Record Office, London

Dates have been retained as they are in the MSS, but the year has been reckoned as beginning on 1 January (not on 25 March as it did in the seventeenth century). Thus admiralty examinations recorded between 1 January and 25 March are given as one year later than they appear in the examination books.

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